

A Collection of Essays

Most, if not all, of these essays were sent to Bruce Robinson of the www.religioustolerance.org web site. Some were posted by Bruce, some were not. I wrote these over a period of time; some bear a date, some do not. However, they are presented here in the order in which they were written (I believe, at any rate).

Some were written under the pseudonym “James B. Gray,” some under my own name. I chose “Gray” simply because I liked the sound of that name. I didn’t know at the time that Bart D. Ehrman was the James A. Gray Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina—from which I received my M. A. in Geography in 1965. Perhaps I chose “James B. Gray” as a result of mental telepathy!

The (excessive!) length of this book is partly due to the repetition, in several of the essays, of discussions of the Bible and the KGF/NeWF/SIG.

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Worship:
An Exercise in Revisioning¹

by

Alton C. Thompson

October 9, 2007

(updated slightly on June 7, 2009)

¹Inspired in part by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989.

Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning

Dictionaries, in defining “worship,” use such abstract words as “reverence,” “devotion,” “homage,” “veneration,” “adoration,” “glorification,” and “praise.” Thereby, they do little to enlighten us as to what “worship” means in *concrete* terms to the average American. If, therefore, one is desirous of obtaining a meaningful conception of how one’s fellow Americans conceive “worship,” one will need to observe them, and then make inferences regarding the contents of the meaning that they assign to the word. With my own use of this approach to the clarification of the meaning of “worship,” I conclude that the typical American conceives “worship” as:

- Involving certain specific types of activities;
- That occur in churches (i.e., buildings);²
- On Sunday mornings (only, usually);
- During “worship services;”
- These having a retrospective orientation; and
- Having the purpose of expressing praise and thanks to God for what He (it is claimed) did for congregants (and/or others) in the recent past.

A scientific study by, e.g., a sociologist³ of what “worship” means, in practice, to the typical American would, I assume, produce a much more complex picture of the meaning of “worship” in America. The above characterization *does*, however, have a basis in fact, and has a basic validity for the typical American at least, I believe.

Given this conventional concept of worship, a lectionary passage read (and commented upon by the presiding clergy member) to many of us on August 12, 2007, was rather disturbing (at least potentially), for it challenged that conventional concept of “worship.” Indeed, this passage suggested that the conventional concept of worship is not only basically wrong, but *grossly* wrong—for it implied that the *Biblical* concept of “worship” is the virtual *exact opposite* of the commonly-accepted one! Ironically, then, a Biblical passage that in effect “convicted” Christian churches for their failure to promote worship in a Biblical sense was read, and commented upon, in many Christian churches on August 12, 2007!

What was the passage in question? It was drawn from Isaiah 1, a part of which reads as follows:

²Those activities may also occur in a studio from which a “church service” is broadcast over the radio or television. Commonly, however, church services that are broadcast emanate from a church building.

³Robert N. Bellah, for example, author (with others) of *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.

(10) . . . Pay attention to what our God is teaching you. (11) He says, “Do you think I want all these sacrifices you keep offering me? I have had more than enough of the sheep you burn as sacrifices and of the fat of your fine animals. I am tired of the blood of bulls and sheep and goats. (12) Who asked you to bring me all this when you come to worship me? Who asked you to do all this tramping around in my Temple? (13) It’s useless to bring your offerings. I am disgusted with the smell of the incense you burn. I cannot stand your New Moon Festivals, your Sabbaths, and your religious gatherings; they are all corrupted by your sins. (14) I hate your New Moon Festivals and holy days; they are a burden that I am tired of bearing. (15) When you lift your hands in prayer, I will not look at you. No matter how much you pray, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with blood. (16) Wash yourselves clean. Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil (17) and learn to do right. See that justice is done—help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.”⁴

I don’t recall whether the word “worship” occurred in the translation used by the pastor whose reading I heard—a fact with some degree of significance, in that in some translations of this passage the word “worship” is not used. But whether or not the translation used by the pastor included the word “worship,” what he emphasized concerning the passage is that *that’s* what it’s about.⁵ The passage begins, he noted, by describing how worship was commonly understood centuries ago—as involving such activities as sacrifices and other offerings, the burning of incense, festivals, and prayer. Then, he continued, the passage contrasts conventional notions of what worship should entail with *God’s* view of the matter, as interpreted by the prophet.

That concept of worship, notice, is a purely *ethical* concept. Indeed, what’s of interest regarding the concept is that it makes only passing reference to what one should *not* do; that is, it makes little reference to *sin*—and, in fact, does not even identify any specific sins. Rather, the concept of worship embedded in this passage focuses on sorts of actions that one *should* do: it refers to the general principle of doing “right,” and then adds some specific examples (helping the oppressed, giving orphans their rights, and defending widows). Put another way, *God’s* concept of “worship” is *service*—meaning, therefore, that “worship” and “service” are synonyms—so that “worship service” is simply a meaningless term (because redundant). Or, rather, is it a term we use to fool others—and ourselves—into believing that our church meetings on Sunday mornings *constitute* “worship” in a Biblical sense? (A rhetorical question, needless to say.)

Which reminds me of the fact that a number of years ago I attended, with a friend, a Quaker (i.e., Society of Friends) meeting. After the meeting, a woman with whom we were conversing

⁴Isaiah 1:10 - 17, *Good News Bible*. New York: American Bible Society, 1976. I have added parentheses to set off the verse numbers. All subsequent references to the Bible come from this version.

⁵Although the pastor did not point out this fact, the Isaiah passage quoted above has a number of parallels in other parts of the Bible: Deuteronomy 10:12; I Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6 - 8, 51:16, and 82:3; Amos 5:21, 22; Micah 6:6 - 8; Jeremiah 6:20, 22:3; and Hosea 6:6. In addition, this concept of worship is implicit in many other passages. For example, one can argue that it is implicit in the famous Good Samaritan parable attributed to Jesus in Luke 10:25 - 37.

apologized for the low attendance that day. She explained that about half of the members were involved in a protest march that morning. In looking back at that experience, it occurs to me that her explanation could have been phrased differently. She could—and should—have stated that half of the members were off *worshipping* in the community. And, therefore, she should have felt no need to apologize—quite the contrary, indeed.

The point is that “worship,” from a Biblical (and especially prophetic) standpoint, involves *activities*, but not the sorts of activities that *typically* occur on Sunday mornings within Christian “sanctuaries.”⁶ Rather, it involves activities of the sort that are referred to in the Isaiah passage. But did this message really “get through” to those who heard this Isaiah passage read, along with the commentary upon it? Surely the cleric reading the passage, and offering comments on it, at least realized the irony involved in his or her presentation that morning. And a few of the congregants may also have recognized the irony. But were either clergy or congregants jolted enough by the message offered that day to think through the implications?⁷ For the clergy involved, did they ask what implications this might have for how religious meetings should be designed? And for the congregants, did they perceive what implications the words they had just heard should have on their conduct during the days ahead? Also, were the congregants encouraged to ask: “Given the activities that I will be involved in this coming week—things I *must* do such as traveling to and from work, working at a job, preparing meals, taking care of my children, going shopping, visiting the dentist/doctor, along with activities that I do during my “free” time—how *helpful* have the activities that occurred during the church meeting that I just attended been for enabling me to engage in worship activities during the coming week?”

Worship, then, involves *activities*, but the sorts of activities specified in the Isaiah passage, not those typically associated with “worship services”—a damning comment to make on Christianity as a religion, to be sure! Granted that protest marches—activities that Quakers are “notorious”

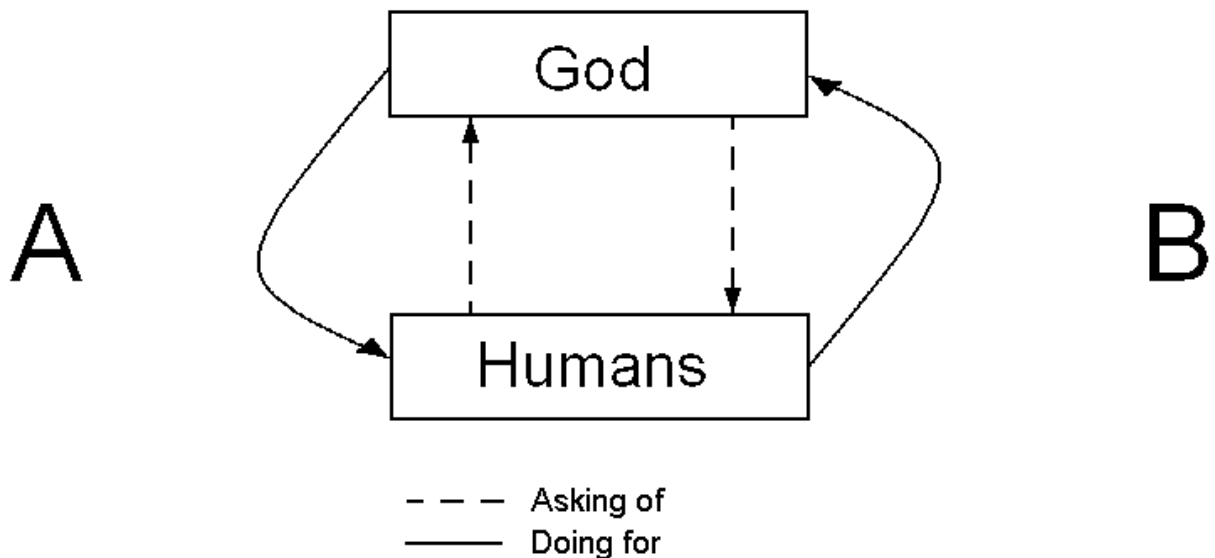
⁶Providing sanctuary from *what*, one might ask! From a knowledge of what worship actually entails?!!

⁷Likely not. One must keep in mind here that the Jesus movement strand from which Christianity arose turned its back on an orientation to the orthopraxy (i.e., concern for right *behavior*) of the Bible for orthodoxy (i.e., concern for correct *belief*). Indeed, a primary reason why this strand attracted “Gentiles” was that the theology it developed drew heavily upon pagan mythology, particularly that associated with the “Mysteries.” (See, e.g., the 30-point list of parallels in Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999, pp. 60 - 61.) Ironically, had not this “paganization” occurred, it’s likely that *none* of the Jesus movements would have survived beyond the fifth century CE, and that Jesus would be only a footnote in some history books. (See Charles Guignebert, *The Christ*. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1968, p. 110. Translated by Peter Ouzts and Phyllis Cooperman; edited and revised by Sonia Volochova. Originally published—posthumously—in French in 1943.)

The reason I say “likely not” is that Christianity has long been in the grip of orthodoxy—each denomination having its own particular orthodoxy, of course—and that therefore most Christians have difficulty thinking outside that “box.” Indeed, many Christians have such a psychological investment in their particular orthodoxy that they are severely disturbed when they encounter views that are discordant with that orthodoxy—to the point that they viciously attack (including physically) the “heretics” who dare think differently. Yet they still call themselves disciples of Jesus!

for engaging in—are not mentioned in the Isaiah passage, but does it follow from *that* fact that protest marches (some of them at least) cannot be considered to be *worship* activities? Another question that arises from our discussion here is: If Sunday morning meetings at churches do not involve worship in a Biblical sense (which they don't!), does this mean that they should be abandoned?!

The above discussion/questions leads me to identify the four questions that I wish to address in this essay, but first let me contrast the conventional concept of “worship” with the Biblical one, using a graphic (above). This figure shows two ways that humans can relate to God. With the “A” way one’s orientation is to God doing for humans, with humans receiving from God, often in response to petitions made to God. With the “B” way one’s orientation is the *inverse* of this—doing for God, with humans receiving revelations and inspiration from God (not necessarily in response to petitions directed to God).



Conventional “worship services” typically involve elements of both orientations, but with an emphasis on the first. Therefore, they in effect primarily involve a “God-as-cosmic-bellhop” concept of God (as someone has put it). Paradoxically, although a blasphemous, or near blasphemous, concept of God is therefore associated with the “A” orientation, those who have this orientation are commonly perceived as the truly pious members of our society! Although “worship” in a Biblical sense is only associated with the “B” orientation, this orientation is not strongly associated with most Christian churches. “Lip service” is, not infrequently, given to the “B” orientation, but that orientation is not firmly embedded within Christianity—giving, thereby, Christianity a rather strange (and strained) relationship with the Christian Bible. Indeed, one might say that insofar as Christians use the Bible, they typically do so to support their biases, rather than paying heed to the Bible’s basic thrust.⁸

⁸Historian Thomas L. Thompson has stated that “the biblical texts are not, for the most part, religious texts themselves. They are rather philosophical critiques of religious tradition and practice.” And: “A substantial core of Christian theology has preferred literalism and historicism to metaphor, and

Needless to say, the orientation that guides the presentation that follows is the “B” one, a fact for which I offer no apologies. As to the specific questions addressed in the pages that follow, they are:

- Must we use a “strict constructionist” approach in defining “worship”? That is, must we restrict our definition of worship activities to those referred to in the Isaiah passage? Does not the Bible—in other passages—provide us with a basis for conceiving “worship” more broadly (so that, e.g., properly-conducted protest marches can be considered a form of worship)? It is true that we can use our rational minds to arrive at a less constrictive concept of “worship,” but does not the Bible itself give us a basis for doing so?
- Is it *necessary* for those who wish to worship in the Biblical sense to meet on a regular basis with like-minded others? Cannot one be an isolate⁹ and still engage in worship activities?
- Even if it is not necessary, is it, though, *advantageous* for those who wish to adopt a worship orientation, and who live in the same general vicinity, to meet on a regular basis? That is, is it not conceivable that their meeting with like-minded others would help them become more *effective* worshipers?¹⁰
- Assuming a group of individuals, all of whom would like to develop a worship orientation, and who wish to meet with one another on a regular basis, *how* should they structure their meetings? Is the conventional structure associated with the mainline churches adequate given their intentions, or would some other structure “work” better?

The two questions that I wish to focus on herein are the first and fourth, and at this point will “dispose” of the other two questions in short order—and then close my introductory remarks with a few other comments. First, as to the second question: Of course it is possible for one to be a “lone ranger” type of worshiper, simply acting as an individual.¹¹ Indeed, the personalities of some individuals are such that they are relatively self-sufficient from an emotional standpoint, and do not feel a strong need to socialize with others. It does not follow, however, that such people are necessarily self-centered; it is entirely conceivable that some such people have a strong social conscience that motivates them to want to engage in worship activities—and enables them to be very effective in doing so as “loners.” If some of those in our midst drawn to

[therefore] stands opposed to its biblical substance [i.e., misses the point of the Bible!].” *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archeology and the Myth of Israel*. New York: Basic Books, 1999, pp. 387 and 394.

⁹I mean by this one who acts as an individual rather than as a member of a group.

¹⁰In this day of communication via conference calls and the internet there is the possibility of interacting with others on a basis other than face-to-face. However, I eschew reference to such possibilities in the pages that follow.

¹¹Indeed, although we can say that only *some* of us are always “lone ranger” worshipers, those who wish to meet on a regular basis with like-minded others are of two categories: those who prefer to act alone, and those whose preference is to act in concert with like-minded others.

worship activities have a preference to plan and act alone, they should not be criticized for that fact. Rather, they should be left alone—and perhaps even encouraged.

I suspect that most people desirous of adopting a worship orientation would, however, prefer to meet with like-minded others on a regular basis—for the simple reason that most people feel a need to interact with their fellows, and are especially desirous of interacting with *like-minded* others. Indeed, our very humanity is only in part genetic in origin: without care from other humans upon birth, most would not even survive—and those few who do, do not become recognizably human.

Why would it be *advantageous*, for those desirous of becoming oriented to a life within which worship plays a prominent role, to meet, on a regular basis, with like-minded others? A more detailed answer to this question is given later, but at this point I can mention that such meeting can provide an opportunity to share one's worship ideas with others, and to learn of others' worship idea—this helping to “recharge one's batteries” for the week ahead. Plus, it can result in ideas for collective efforts, joint planning for the implementation of such efforts, followed by working together with others in their actual implementation—these various activities helping create feelings of solidarity/community within the group. Other potential benefits are identified in Section B below, but at this point I simply wish to indicate that there *are* potential benefits in like-minded people meeting on a regular basis (whether the purpose of such meetings is worship or something else).

However, a point that I wish to emphasize herein is that the potential benefits associated with like-minded people meeting on a regular basis will only be realized if the meetings *themselves* are *structure*—i.e., designed properly. The conventional Christian religious service involves, e.g., a member of the clergy reading from Scripture to congregants, administering various sacraments to them, and delivering a sermon/homily to them. Is such a “meeting design” conducive to the promotion of worship activities, during the days ahead, on the part of those attending? My answer is that it is not—and that this is also true of the so-called “contemporary service”: it tends to be no more oriented to worship in a Biblical sense than is the conventional “service”! Because I have little faith in the design of the conventional religious meeting, in Section B below I offer an alternate design—after first specifying a series of design principles.

The final point that I would like to make in these introductory remarks is that the Isaiah passage (much of the Bible, indeed) ostensibly is addressed to a society's “haves,” so that it seemingly suggests that only “haves” can—and need to—engage in worship activities; and that, further, a meeting established for those interested in dedicating a part of their life to worship activities would be open only to “haves.” It is true that many, if not most, of the directives contained in the Bible were/are primarily intended for a society's “haves.” We must keep in mind, however, the words of Paul:

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.
There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There
are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability*

*to everyone for their particular service. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.*¹²

Everyone—"haves" and "have nots" alike—has abilities, there being *qualitative* differences among us in what those abilities are. *Our* society likes to emphasize *quantitative* differences, of course, but where *worship* activities are involved, we should not carry over our habit of thinking in quantitative terms—in part because it is impossible to know the future effects of worship actions. More importantly, however, those with a true worship orientation will think it contradictory to that orientation to apply quantitative thinking to their worship activities. Consequently, meetings involving those desirous of further developing an orientation to worship activities may very well include the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the professional and the laborer, the educated and the school dropout, the female and the male, the "believer" and the non-believer, the straight and the gay, etc., etc. It goes without saying that worship and hatred of one's fellows are incompatible. A meeting established for those with an orientation to worship activities *must* be open to all those having—or desiring further to acquire—that orientation.

The first and fourth questions identified above require more attention than was given above to the second and third questions, and Sections A and B below address those questions. Section A "mines" the Christian Bible, searching for discussions of worship that parallel the Isaiah passage quoted earlier, but broaden that concept of worship. Section B then identifies design principles for meetings having as their purpose helping attendees prepare themselves for worship activities. It does not apply those principles to the conventional "worship service"—or even "contemporary service," for that matter—leaving such application to the reader. Rather, the focus of Section B is the presentation of a new sort of design for religious meetings—specifically ones for individuals desirous of acquiring a "B" sort of orientation (to allude to the figure presented earlier). That section not only describes the salient features of the new type of meeting, but identifies the principles to be used in conducting meetings, and indicates the sorts of "outcomes" expected for attendees—both as individuals, and as a group.

Worship in the Bible

The Bible is a complex book. It contains numerous literary genres. And numerous perspectives have been expressed regarding what the Bible is Aabout." For example, in a single book (!) we find these "summaries" of the Bible:¹³

- "It [the Bible] is the account of a faithless people and a faithful God who seek constantly to renew their relationship each with the other."
- "If the Bible were just about the successful and the pious it would be little more than a collection of Horatio Alger tales or Barbara Cartland romances. It could aspire at best to

¹²I Corinthians 12:4 - 7.

¹³Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. New York: Avon Books, 1996, pp. 65, 185, 188, 191, 196, 246, 259, 267, 326, and 327.

the status of *Aesop's Fables* or a Norse epic. What makes the Bible interesting and compelling is the company of human beings who through its pages play their parts in the drama of the human and the divine.”

- “The Bible is an account of that great company of people who have both sought and found a way. We should take them seriously, for they have much to tell us.”
- “The Bible, if nothing else, is a book about the dangers of false trust.”
- “. . . the Bible is about the formation of a fellowship, a community of men and women who are reminded over and over again that they are not alone, not on their own but part of a communion”
- “If the Bible is about anything, it is about the subtle, ruthless, remorseless persistence of evil.”
- “[. . . the hypothetical book] *Why Good People Do Bad Things*.^[14] That is what we have been talking about all along, and it is no small subject of the Bible as well.”
- “. . . the Bible, if it is anything at all, is an essay in the genealogy of temptation.”
- “. . . the Bible . . . is a book not about limits but about infinity, and visions, not history minus but poetry plus.”
- “The Bible . . . is the record of those for whom mystery and meaning are not antithetical but a life’s work in the growing knowledge of self and of God.”

Despite the fact that the Bible lends itself to a variety of interpretations, I have developed a certain perspective on the Bible over the years, and it is that perspective which guides the discussion throughout this essay.¹⁵ My particular perspective on the Bible has especially been shaped by a book that I acquired in 1975, an old book by Theodore Gerald Soares.¹⁶ For what this book did for me was to help me conceive of the Bible as a record of sorts of a certain *tradition*; a tradition which—significantly—did not end with Bible times—a point that Soares made clear in his final chapter (XXXVII, “The Social Teachings of Jesus and the Prophets in the Modern World,” pp. 369 - 80). Given that that tradition (which I like to capitalize as Tradition) continued beyond Bible times, what Soares was in effect telling me was that I, as a reader of his book, should take his hint—to the effect that I (*any* reader, in fact) should be not just an *observer*

¹⁴The allusion here is, of course, to Rabbi Harold Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

¹⁵Note that my interest (unlike Gomes’s) is not in *summarizing* the Bible but, rather, identifying and discussing passages that support, and expand upon, the Isaiah 1 passage quoted earlier.

¹⁶*The Social Institutions and Ideals of the Bible*. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925. Originally published in 1915.

and *student* of the Tradition, but should become a *part* of it—by *entering* it as a participant. One implication of this “suggestion” being, of course, that rather than striving to become a *disciple* of Jesus, one should, rather, strive to be *like* Jesu—in the sense of becoming (like Jesus) a *contributor* to the Tradition, one who is working to *continue*, and even *further develop*,¹⁷ the Tradition. Put another way, one should strive to be “authored” by the Tradition (to use a word associated with theologian Delwin Brown, who uses it in conjunction with the Bible).

How should that Tradition be characterized? No doubt it can be thought of in a variety of ways, but I think of it as including (but not necessarily being restricted to) ideas regarding what constitutes worship, plans to engage in worship, ideas concerning how to remove barriers to worship, and actions to implement those plans.

More recently, my perspective on the Bible has been strengthened by my reading of some works by historian Thomas L. Thompson. Besides the book by him cited earlier, and of even more relevance (for my presentation here), is Thompson’s recent *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*.¹⁸ For Thompson detects, in the Bible, a tradition that parallels rather closely the one that *I* perceive—and discusses it with an impressive level of sophistication.

Thompson argues (p. x) that “The Pentateuch [i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy] and the early Jewish biblical tradition present Samaritan and Jewish versions of an ancient Near Eastern understanding of the late first millennium BCE; the [canonical] gospels present and share this same intellectual and literary tradition in the Greco-Roman period of late Hellenism.” Although this statement does not indicate the *nature* of the tradition, it *does* make several assertions of interest:

- Members of a certain tradition¹⁹ produced the Pentateuch (and other parts of the “Old Testament”).
- This tradition was not only *not* unique to Judaism, but was a common one in the ancient Near East before Judaism ever existed. (Indeed, one can argue that the behaviors associated with the tradition are rooted in “human nature”—contrary to the claims²⁰ of

¹⁷It should be obvious that the members of the Tradition whose names we know are primarily individuals who were *innovators* in some sense.

¹⁸New York: Basic Books, 2005.

¹⁹Thompson refers to it as “the greater tradition” on, e.g., p. 35. He more commonly uses the phrase “The Song for a Poor Man” to refer to the tradition. This is the title of his Chapter 4 (pp. 107 - 35); Appendix I (pp. 323 - 35) is entitled “Examples of the Song for a Poor Man;” and the phrase also occurs on pp. 156, 186, 191, 192, 194, 212, 277, 299, and 305.

²⁰Claims, by the way, that have had horrific consequences. See, e.g., R. [ichard] C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984; and Steven Rose, *Lifelines: Biology Beyond Determinism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

the “original sin” crowd.²¹⁾

- The canonical gospels are in that same tradition.²²

Whereas all of these points should be of interest to anyone concerned with “Bible history,” the point of particular note here (so far as I am concerned) is Thompson’s considered view that the canonical gospels should be regarded as *part* of—an *extension* of, in fact—a tradition that began centuries before they were written. A view, by the way, that prevents one from viewing the Old Testament as a book whose only interest to the Christian is that it (supposedly) makes numerous predictions (i.e., “prophecies”) regarding Jesus—a view of the “Old Testament” that I, a non-Jew, reject utterly.²³

In identifying and commenting upon the specifics of the Tradition it is useful to begin with what would appear to be the earliest version of the Ten Commandments found in the Bible. What I am referring to here is the version that appears in Exodus 34:12 - 26 (identified in Exodus 34:28 thusly: “. . . the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments,” and preceded in v. 11 with these words: “Obey the laws that I am giving you [Moses directly] today. I will drive out the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, as you advance [toward the Promised Land].”):

²¹See, e.g., *Good Natured: The Origin of Right and Wrong in Human and Other Animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. Insofar as these behavioral tendencies are “natural” for humans, this would not be attributable to Darwinian “natural selection”—a concept which has little relevance for explaining real-world phenomena, contrary to what is often claimed—but, rather, to sexual selection. See, e.g., Nancy Makepeace Tanner, *On Becoming Human*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981. See especially pages 164, 165, and 210. I should add to my statement that the *Darwinian* concept of natural selection has little real-world explanatory value, that “natural selection” is given a variety of meanings, and part of the fault for this fact lies with Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* itself, with its “mushy” prose. Thus, when Robert Wright asked, “Why did natural selection give us that vast guilt repository known as conscience?,” it is not clear what specific meaning he was giving the term. (Wright, *The Moral Animal: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994, p. 5.) Finally, I should add that this Wright quotation serves to illustrate the point that many who use the term “natural selection” fail to indicate what specific meaning they are attaching to the term. That is, for too many writers, “natural selection” has been a mere mantra. See Francis Hitching, *The Neck of the Giraffe: Where Darwin Went Wrong*. New Haven, CT: Ticknor & Fields, 1982, p. 104.

²²I find it of interest that Thompson evidently does not regard Paul as having been a part of the Tradition: In his “Index of Biblical Citations” (pp. 381 - 96) he lists (p. 395) only I Corinthians 7:29, 30 and [I] Thessalonians 4:15 - 17. (He also lists Ephesians 5:26, but that book is generally regarded as inauthentic by scholars.) I must add here that although I have problems with Paul, I *do* see Paul as an important contributor to the tradition.

²³A more rational way to perceive so-called prophecies regarding Jesus in the Old Testament is to recognize that they were basically copied from the Old Testament and inserted into the New. See, e.g., Randel McCraw Helms’s *Gospel Fictions* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988) and *Who Wrote the Gospels?* (Altadena, CA: Millennium Press, 1997) for excellent discussions of the matter.

1. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country into which you are going: this could be a fatal trap for you.
2. Tear down their altars, destroy their sacred pillars, and cut down their symbols of the goddess Asherah.
3. Do not worship any other god [for there *are* other gods].
4. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country [you are about to enter].
5. Do not make gods of metal and worship them.
6. Keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread.
7. Every first-born son and first-born domestic animal belongs to me.
8. No one is to appear before me without an offering.
9. Do not work on the seventh day, not even during plowing time or harvest.
10. Keep the Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters.
11. Three times a year all of your men must come to worship me.
12. Do not offer bread made with yeast when you sacrifice an animal to me.
13. Do not keep until the following morning any part of the animal killed at the Passover Festival.
14. Each year bring to the house of the LORD the first grain that you harvest.
15. Do not cook a young sheep or goat in its mother's milk.

Note here first that there are 14 “commandments” rather than 10 (given that 1 and 4 are virtually identical). And note, second, that although they are referred to as “commandments,” they are all better referred to as *regulations*,²⁴ with none of them being *laws*. (In contrast, in the version of the Ten Commandments²⁵ given in Exodus 20:1 - 17, 6 of the 10 are laws.)

²⁴Most of which are cultic in nature; laws, in contrast, can be thought of as commands having an ethical content.

²⁵I find it interesting that many professing Christians place great stock in the Ten Commandments, not realizing, seemingly, that in a very real sense Paul's letters (his discussion of the Holy Spirit in particular) make those Commandments passé. For an interesting (if old) discussion of the Ten Commandments see “History and the Commandments” in (pp. 271 - 75) Louis Wallis, *The Bible is Human*. New York: AMS Press; a reprint of the 1942 edition published by Columbia University Press.

Note also (the non-obvious—and also rather embarrassing—point) that to attribute commands to God is to perceive (if but implicitly) God as a king-like being. An important implication of *that* fact is that one thereby “admits” that God cannot *cause* people to engage (or refrain from engaging) in certain behaviors, but can only *order* them to. That is, God is not *omnipotent* (a Greek concept, and therefore one foreign to the Bible); and in not being omnipotent, God does not, then, have the *ability* to create the cosmos and its components! So that the God who, in Genesis, creates the cosmos *cannot* be the same God who in, e.g., Deuteronomy, issues commands. It is true that the Bible contains evidence that the *henotheism* (i.e., the idea that gods are only tribal gods) of the early Hebrews gave way to *monotheism* (i.e., the idea that there is but *one* true God); there is, however, no need to resolve those two views of God because they are not in serious conflict).

The Bible does not, however, resolve the contradiction identified here regarding the *nature* of God—and has the Law-giving God somehow (without explanation) also be the Creator God. In a sense, the Bible “resolves” (or at least has been so interpreted) the conflict by making the claim that God created humans with “free will,” and therefore able to choose either good or evil. But this assertion—and its associated “explanation”—amounts to a “shifty sophistication”²⁶ in that it raises the question: If God had the ability to give humans free will, how is it that subsequently He lacked an ability to *withdraw* that “gift”—and then intervene in human affairs? And if He has continued to reveal truths to people (a type of intervention), how is *that* consistent with His decision not to intervene in a more direct way? Etc.

But these are theological issues that need not detain us here; besides, I lack talent in the field of intellectual contortionism! Let us get back to the matter at hand, and allow the theologians to wallow in their speculations regarding these esoteric matters—while there is still paid employment available to them!

To return to this “primitive” version of the “Ten Commandments”: Why their lack of ethical content? What I would hypothesize as the answer is that this version was created at a time in Hebrew history when the tribes were small enough to be extended families. As such, sharing would have occurred as a matter of course; and as a consequence, there would have been no *need* for ethical laws.²⁷ That is, *mores*—unwritten “laws”—existed in the society such that when neediness was observed, that neediness was automatically “ministered to” by fellow tribal

²⁶A phrase derived from this sentence: “. . . the courts, standing on a secure and familiar natural-rights footing, have commonly made short work of the shifty sophistications which trade-union advocates have offered for their consideration.” Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers, 1973, p. 329. With prefatory note by Joseph Dorfman, and a review by James Hayden Tufts. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1904. This book is, along with most of Veblen’s other books, available online at <http://de.geocities.com/veblenite>.

²⁷For an excellent discussion of tribal societies see David Maybury-Lewis, *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*. New York: Viking, 1992. A more comprehensive, if less sophisticated (and recent), book is Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley, *The Challenge of the Primitives*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975. For an excellent “tribal” critique of American society see Kent Nerburn, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With an Indian Elder*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1994.

members able so to do (and this was done largely because humans, *qua* humans, are so “programmed.”). Because the mores of the tribe “prescribed” much of their behavior, members of the tribe had no need for laws as *we* know them (i.e., written rules of an ethical nature). As tribes expanded in size, however, not only did a breakdown of the mores occur; with their breakdown, people began to *neglect* those of their fellows with physical needs. Indeed, there even began the *exploitation*²⁸ of one’s fellows—thereby adding to whatever neediness already existed.²⁹ Because some of those with memories of the “old days” perceived (or was revelation involved here?) that their society was “going downhill,” they took matters into their own hands and initiated the Tradition. That is, they created a series of laws (these being subjected to editing over a long period of time), and attributed them to “God” to give them force—so that the laws would be followed (they hoped—vainly, as it turns out). Thus, the contribution of these initiators of the Tradition was not only to create ethical laws, but attribute them to God.³⁰

Why view the commands listed above as antecedent to the birth of the Tradition, given that they utterly lack in ethical content—i.e., are not in the least oriented to human well-being? Because they represent an attempt to influence the behavior of their fellows, and were attributed to God (as if God were a king-like Being³¹). In fact, one can argue that the *reason* they were attributed to God was the hope (if but unconscious), on the part of those who created the commands, that such an attribution would lend force to the commands—would, i.e., *motivate* people to follow the commands. When, later, laws of an *ethical* nature appeared on the scene, there was precedent for stating them as commands issued by God—with, again, the reason (probably not recognized consciously by those involved) for so doing being to motivate their fellows to follow the commands.

²⁸Yes, Mr. Marx, exploitation didn’t begin with Capitalism. It just became more subtle. See, e.g., Chapter V (“*Das Kapital*,” pp. 91 - 129) in Michael Harrington, *Socialism*. New York: Bantam Books, 1973. Originally published by Saturday Review Press in 1972.

²⁹It is interesting to read I Samuel 8, wherein the “leaders of Israel” told Samuel that he was getting old, so that he should “appoint a king to rule over us” Samuel was displeased with this request, and in praying to the LORD was told “I am the one they have rejected as their king.” The LORD then told Samuel to “listen to them, but give them strict warnings and explain how their kings will treat them.” Samuel then took the LORD’s advice, and proceeded to list all of the disadvantages of having a king—e.g., “He will take a tenth of your flocks. And you yourselves will become his slaves.” But the people “paid no attention to Samuel, but said “No! We want a king, so that we will be like other nations, with our own king to rule us and lead us out to war and to fight our battles.” What’s interesting here is that the writer/editor—writing long after the events “reported”—knew that exploitation had begun in Hebrew society especially after the rise of the kingship institution, so that the “warnings—or predictions—attributed here to Samuel were actually historical facts.

³⁰Note here that I am not denying the existence of God, but am only denying that the laws being referred to here were literally given to the early Hebrews by God. Which is *not* to say, however, that revelation may not have been involved with them. Regarding this latter point, I would add that we *cannot* know with any degree of certainty one way or the other.

³¹Indeed, it appears that this attribution of commands to God occurred some time *after* the rise of the kingship institution, and that the king was used as the model for God (henotheism first, then monotheism).

The ethical laws/commands that *did* develop in Hebrew society can be classified as follows. (Indeed, let me add at this point that, in my opinion, these ethical laws form the very heart of the Law—a point that I will defend later in this section.) Note that although the commands of the familiar version of the Ten Commandments were directed at *all* Hebrews, the following are directed specifically at the society's "haves"—and have their basis in the fact that neediness existed in the society. In addition, it is important to note that a tacit assumption underlying these laws is that the needy were in that state through no fault of their own: they were needy because they were widows, their husbands having been killed in battle; they were needy because they were orphans, their parents having been killed; they were needy because they were poor, this resulting from bad weather or an army stealing their crops/animals; strangers might very well be needy for the simple reason that they were away from home; etc. (We moderns need to keep this fact in mind, because it does not follow that because the needy in ancient Hebrew society were needy through no fault of their own, that that is necessarily true in *our* society today. However, given our tendency—as "good Christians"—to "blame the victim"—for his laziness,³² bad habits, etc.—we moderns need to avoid our tendency to "blame the victim" in knee-jerk fashion, without any analysis of *why* someone is needy.)

(The "ameliorative" laws referred to below are ones that are oriented to existing situations; "restorative" ones, in contrast, have as their intention the restoration of a previously-existing situation. The actions demanded of commands can be either direct or indirect, and also may be either injunctions—i.e., commands to *do* something—or prohibitions—i.e., commands to *not* do something. Finally, commands can be thought of as varying in their degree of specificity—although it is not always easy to decide *where*, on the specific-abstract continuum, one should place a given command.)

I. Ameliorative

A. Direct

1. Injunctions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

2. Prohibitions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

³²"Laziness" is one of those words in our language that simultaneously describes (perhaps with accuracy) and explains (wrongly, usually).

B. Indirect (all of which are specific)

1. Injunctions
2. Prohibitions

II. Restorative

- A. Abstract
- B. Specific.

Let us next, then, identify specific laws under the above headings:

1. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:9 - If a man buys a female slave for his son, he is to treat her like a daughter. (From our perspective today this is an abstract injunction, but in the context of ancient Hebrew society—a “high context” society³³—would not have been.)
- b. Leviticus 19:18 – Don’t take revenge, or hate; love your neighbor as you love yourself.
- c. Leviticus 19:32 - Respect the elderly [again, a law that would have had a more concrete meaning in ancient Israel than it has for us].
- d. Leviticus 25:35 - You must provide for a poor neighbor.
- e. Deuteronomy 5:16 - Respect your parents [also a law that would have had a more specific meaning for the ancient Hebrews].
- f. Deuteronomy 10:19 - Show love for foreigners—because *you* were once foreigners [i.e., in captivity in Egypt].

2. Specific Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:10 - If a man takes a second wife, he must continue to give the first wife the same amount of food and clothing, and the same rights.
- b. Exodus 22:26 - If you take a cloak as a pledge, give it back in the evening [for I am merciful, God says in the next verse].
- c. Deuteronomy 15:7 - 9 - If a fellow Israelite is in need, don’t be selfish; lend [don’t give!] him as much as he needs.

³³I believe that the concept of “high context” societies and “low context” ones was introduced by Ronald Simkins.

- d. Deuteronomy 24:15 - Before sundown, pay the wages of those to whom you owe wages.
3. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions
- a. Exodus 22:21 – Don’t mistreat foreigners.
 - b. Exodus 22:22 – Don’t mistreat widows or orphans.
 - c. Exodus 23:9 – Don’t mistreat foreigners; you know how it *feels* to be one.
 - d. Leviticus 19:33 – Don’t mistreat foreigners, for you were once foreigners.
 - e. Leviticus 25:46 – Don’t treat you fellow Israelites harshly.
4. Specific Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions
- a. Exodus 20:1 - 17 - The Ten Commandments. [Most of these can be considered as rather specific in nature: don’t murder, commit adultery, steal, accuse others falsely, desire another man’s house/wife/slaves, etc.]
 - b. Exodus 21:20 – Don’t kill a slave or you will be punished [*how* not being specified].
 - c. Exodus 22:25 – Don’t require interest in loaning to a poor man.
 - d. Exodus 23:6 – Don’t deny justice to a poor man [i.e., be even-handed].
 - e. Leviticus 19:13 – Don’t take advantage of [i.e., exploit] anyone, don’t rob anyone, don’t hold back anyone’s wages.
 - f. Leviticus 19:14 – Don’t curse a deaf man, or cause a blind man to stumble.
 - g. Leviticus 25:37 – Don’t charge a poor neighbor any interest; don’t make a profit from the food you sell him.
 - h. Deuteronomy 5:7 - 21 [The Ten Commandments are repeated here, in a version very close to the Exodus 20 version.]
 - i. Deuteronomy 23:19 - In loaning to a fellow Israelite, charge no interest.
5. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Injunctions (an interesting category!—in that there are more ethical laws in this category than in any other one)
- a. Exodus 16:23 - The seventh day is to be a day of rest, dedicated to the LORD. [John Dominic Crossan has made this brilliant comment regarding the significance of the “sabbath” day: “The sabbath day represents a temporary stay of inequality, a day of rest for everyone alike, for animals and humans, for slaves and owners, for children and adults. Why? Because that is how God sees the

world. Sabbath rest sends all alike back to symbolic egalitarianism. It is a regular stay against the activity that engenders inequality on the other days of the week.”³⁴]

- b. Exodus 23:11 - On each seventh year let the land rest, but the poor may eat whatever grows on it during that year.
- c. Leviticus 19:9, 10 - In harvesting, leave the grain at the edges of the field for the poor; and leave the grapes in the vineyard that were missed for the poor and foreigners. [The law of *gleaning*.]
- d. Leviticus 23:22 [The gleaning of grain is referred to again.]
- e. Leviticus 23:42 - During the Festival of Shelters everyone is to live in temporary shelters for seven days. [What Crossan says regarding the sabbath day—see above—would also seem to be applicable here in that some temporary leveling would be involved, and this might help to renew feelings of empathy on the part of “haves” relative to the “have nots,” and other needy people, in their midst. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the wording here for verses 42 and 43 is: “All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants may know that the LORD made the people live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the LORD your God.”]
- f. Leviticus 25:4 - 6 - Let your land rest every seventh year. But even though it is not cultivated, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, foreigners, and domestic/wild animals [but not the poor?!].
- g. Deuteronomy 5:12 - 14 - Observe the Sabbath; this includes foreigners in your midst, and slaves.
- h. Deuteronomy 14:22 - 29 - [The law of the tithe (so often misrepresented—and utterly so—by the churches!)] Each year take a tenth of your production and celebrate with it; however, on each *third* year the tithe is to go to [what we today would call “food pantries”] for Levites [who have no property], foreigners, orphans, and widows.
- i. Deuteronomy 23:24 - In walking on a path in someone’s vineyard you can eat grapes along the way, but are not permitted to take any away in a container.
- j. Deuteronomy 23:25 - In walking on a path in someone’s grain field, you can eat the grain that you can pull off with your hands, but don’t cut any with a sickle [or carry any away in a container?].

³⁴*The Birth of Christianity*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, p. 189.

- k. Deuteronomy 24:19 - 21 - After gathering your crops, leave what's left for foreigners, widows, and orphans. The same for your olive orchards and grape vineyards.
 - l. Deuteronomy 26:12 - Every third year give the tithe to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows.
- 6. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Prohibitions
 - a. Leviticus 25:23 - Land cannot be permanently sold, because it belongs to God.
- 7. Abstract Restorative Laws
 - a. Leviticus 19:18 - Love your neighbor as yourself [a law that should be followed not only in the here-and-now, but in a fashion that restores a situation wherein neediness should not occur, or occur but rarely].
- 8. Specific Restorative Laws
 - a. Exodus 21:2 - All Hebrew slaves are to be set free in the seventh year.
 - b. Leviticus 25:10 - 12 - The fiftieth year [referred to as the Jubilee year] is to be set apart. All property that has been sold is to be restored to the original owner or his descendants; all slaves are to be returned to their families.
 - c. Deuteronomy 15:1 - At the end of each seventh year, cancel the debts of all those who owe you money [except for foreigners, verse 3 adds!].

We have, then, here an amazing set of laws, created for an agricultural society within which relatively little (on a per capita basis) long-distance trade occurred. This fact needs to be pointed out, because it is clear that the laws are not meant to be applied in an urban-industrial society such as the one we are living in at present. Still, they are of interest to us moderns because they demonstrate that a relatively simple society is capable of creating a rather sophisticated—and thoughtfully humane—set of laws. What I find of particular interest is the laws that specify *indirect* actions to help those in need. There is recognition here that few want handouts, because their dignity as human beings is affected adversely in accepting handouts. Therefore, those who created this set of laws had the sensitivity—the genius!—to create laws that enabled the needy to receive help while maintaining their dignity. This is not to say that outright giving is not commanded in these laws, but the inclusion of the various injunctions for helping others in indirect ways seems to suggest to those to whom they are directed (i.e., “haves”) that in helping others they give consideration not only to the *physical* needs of others, but the *psychological* need on the part of recipients for retaining their sense of dignity. What wisdom!

What's interesting about the ethical laws presented in the Pentateuch is not just the laws themselves, but the *tactics* used by the writers to *motivate* people to follow those laws (another contribution to the Tradition on the part of the early Hebrews). For example, consider the following familiar—and beautiful—passage:

“Israel [said Moses], remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands [from God] that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4 - 9)

The writer in this case is using what might be termed a “reminder” strategy, advising his fellows to do various things to remind him of the laws (*all* of them, not just the ethical ones)—in the hope that they will then *follow* the laws (i.e., commands that they have attributed to God).

Three additional such tactics can be identified:

- Attempts to generate feelings of empathy for the needy in one’s society.
- Promises for obedience.
- Threats for disobedience.

Let us briefly address each in turn, for these, too, represent contributions to the Tradition—and as such are pertinent to the Bible’s treatment of worship.

1. Feelings of Empathy

- a. The Hebrews are frequently reminded in the Pentateuch that they were slaves in Egypt, and that the LORD had delivered them from that slavery. For example, in Deuteronomy 24:21, 22 we find these words: “When you have gathered your grapes, do not go back over the vines a second time; the grapes that are left are for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Never forget that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I have given you this command.”

This reminder seems to have two functions. First, by reminding the Hebrews that they (or their ancestors) had been (supposedly) slaves, the expectation was that they would feel empathy for slaves and other “have nots.” In fact in Exodus 23:9, we find: “Do not mistreat a foreigner; you know how it *feels* to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.” (*italics added*) Second, by reminding the Hebrews that God had (allegedly) delivered them from slavery, an implicit contract (“covenant”) is being stated: “I have done for you (have delivered you from slavery), now it’s your turn to do for me—and what I want you to do is obey my laws.”³⁵

³⁵Perhaps this can be regarded as the initial version of the covenant concept. Preceding such a command, however, is, e.g., this one: “Do not spread lies about anyone, and when someone is on trial for life, speak out if your testimony can help him. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:16) A covenant is a sort of contract between God and humans—but one written and imposed by God! In this case we simply have a command of God: “Do such and such simply because I am ordering you to do it.” A covenant involves both God and humans, with the earliest true covenant in the Bible taking the form, “I delivered you from slavery in Egypt, now it’s your turn to do something for me (i.e., obey the laws that I have given you).

- b. Institution of the Sabbath day, by giving everyone (including animals) a day of rest, is an equalizer (if but temporary). Besides that, it gives “haves” a time to reflect on how they treat others relative to what God wants—so that they can resolve to do better during the upcoming week.
- c. The Festival of Booths is also not only a (temporary) leveler, but a period of time that brings “haves” and “have nots” together. This, along with the fact that it gives “haves” a fairly lengthy time to reflect on how they treat others, may cause “haves” to improve their relationships with their less fortunate fellows. I use the term “less fortunate” deliberately here because the Bible’s dominant perspective on societal position seems to be that if one is a “have not,” this is not because one is lazy, etc., but, rather, because one either is being exploited by a fellow Hebrew, or has simply had bad luck. Indeed, the Hebrew Scripture’s explanation for why poverty exists in a society seems to be: “Haves” are ignoring God’s laws! How different is the attitude in our society!—in which instead of blaming “haves” for the existence of poverty (neediness in general), we “blame the victim”—and thoughtlessly at that.
- c. The Passover festival might also be mentioned under the “empathy” heading, especially given that it is specifically a “remembrance” festival that commemorates God’s (alleged) deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. As one of the three “pilgrim festivals” the other two being Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Pentecost)—it would have resulted in people traveling to Jerusalem. Given that this would have resulted in contact with fellow Jews in other “economic” (and other neediness situations—e.g., the lame) circumstances, these three festivals may have been designed, in part, to induce feelings of empathy in the society’s “haves” for those less fortunate than themselves.

2. Promises for Obedience, Threats for Disobedience

There is a famous passage in Deuteronomy (11:26 - 28) that reads: “Today I [the LORD] am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before.” What should be noticed in this passage is that the LORD is not addressing Hebrews as *individuals* but as a *collective*. In Jesus’s time the Law was being given an individualistic interpretation, but centuries earlier that was by no means the case: the Pentateuch has the Law being given to a *people*, and the blessings promised for obedience and curses threatened for disobedience are also directed at a *people*.

Thus, the *promises* given in Leviticus 26:3-6 are directed at the Hebrews as a *people*: “If you [as a people] live according to my laws and obey my commands, I will send you rain at the right time, so that the land will produce crops and the trees will bear fruit. Your crops will be so plentiful that you will still be harvesting grain when it is time to pick grapes, and you will still be picking grapes when it is time to plant grain. You will have all that you want to eat, and you can live in safety in your land. I will give you peace in your land, and you can sleep without being

Later, the covenant took on a new form: “Do for me (i.e., follow my laws), and I will bless you (as a people).

afraid of anyone. I will get rid of the dangerous animals in the land, and there will be no more war there.” Likewise, the punishments for disobedience are to be borne by the group, and are essentially the converse of the blessings for obedience. (See, e.g., the passage in Leviticus 26 that begins with verse 14.)

Note here the important point that although the ethical laws listed above are *implicitly* directed at the society’s “haves,” they are *explicitly* directed at the Hebrews as a *people*. Thus, the society’s “have nots” are not made to feel that they are somehow people of a lesser sort—so that again, psychological considerations were involved in how the laws were stated (even though the intentions were different). (Unfortunately, this fact that the laws were *seemingly* directed at the Hebrews in general became misused; for as thinking, at a later point, became more individualistic, “haves” began turning these laws, and specifically the covenant concept, on its head—a point given more attention shortly, in discussing Jesus’s contribution to the Tradition.)

Interestingly, although the *promises* in the Pentateuch for obedience to the Law are directed at the group, and not individuals, such is not the case regarding *punishments* for disobedience. Many such punishments are intended for *individuals* who violate certain specific laws. For example, a number of such cases are given in Exodus 20, including this one (v. 14): “If a man marries a woman and her mother, all three shall be burned to death because of the disgraceful thing they have done; such a thing must not be permitted among you.” In cases where the violator is not condemned to death, there may be punishment combined with the offering of a sacrifice. This is not to say that all of the sacrifices (using that term generically) discussed in, e.g., Leviticus have the purpose of atoning for wrongful behavior (e.g., fellowship offerings are for a different purpose³⁶), but the principal purpose of sacrifices appears to be atonement for sins committed—restoring the harmony that had existed prior to the “tearing of the societal fabric” associated with law-breaking.

A few pages earlier I suggested that ethical laws (and specifically ones other than those in the Ten Commandments) are the “heart” of the Law. I have just completed a review of the ethical laws, but given that the Pentateuch contains many laws other than ethical ones, what is my basis for asserting that the *ethical* laws are the principal ones? What I would point to in response is that in Deuteronomy 15:4, 5 we find: “Not one of your people will be poor if you obey him [God] and carefully observe everything that I [Moses] command you today.” Note that we have a *promise* here, but it is one that is different from other promises in the Old Testament. It makes no reference to blessings that will be received by the Hebrews as a people if they obey God’s commands, nor does it appeal to self-interest on the part of the society’s “haves.” It doesn’t even try to convince people to obey God’s commands because it is their turn to do for God (God having done for them, by liberating them from their Egyptian captors). Nor does it try to induce feelings of empathy for the poor in the society’s “haves.” A very unusual—and interesting—statement in Deuteronomy, then!

The “promise” here, note, is simply an off-hand—and ostensibly unimportant—commentary on what the *societal situation* will be like if God’s laws are followed. Not just the ethical laws,

³⁶Indeed, it seems to be generally true that *sacrifices* are for atoning for sins committed, *offerings* (a special type of sacrifice) serve some other purpose.

mind you, but *all* of them. But take notice: The clear suggestion here is that *the writers of these five books had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent*. John Dominic Crossan would have us believe (as I noted earlier) that these writers wanted the creation of a radically egalitarian society, but I see that claim as overstating the Bible writers' intentions. Rather, I believe that a more reasonable conclusion is that they wished to restore a situation within which physical neediness would be absent. (They were, I might add, writing so as to give the impression that they were writing while the Hebrews were living in Palestine under the institution of kingship.)

One might argue, I suppose, that they were "reaching" for the "utopian" situation described briefly at several points in the Old Testament. The "utopia" that I am referring to here is first presented (albeit negatively) in Deuteronomy 28:30: "You will build a house—but never live in it. You will plant a vineyard—but never eat its grapes." We find that utopian situation stated positively, however, in Isaiah 65:21, 22: "People will build houses and get to live in them—they will not be used by someone else. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the wine—It will not be drunk by others." And in Jeremiah 31:4, 5: "Once again I will rebuild you. Once again you will take up your tambourines and dance joyfully. Once again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria, and those who plant them will eat what the vineyards produce."

But such a utopia would be a rather strange one, from a Biblical standpoint, for two reasons. First, because it makes no reference to the presence of priests, one must assume that it *has* no priests! Why? Because there is no *need* for them, given that no one would be sinning in such a society, one would assume. Second, this utopia has no need for the love command (except with reference to child care?), because no physical neediness exists in the society. Given these features, and my assumption that the writers of the Bible were wise enough to recognize that there will always be poor people,³⁷ orphans, and widows in the society, it seems to me that they believed that what should be strived for is not a perfect society, but the minimization of physical neediness. This is not to say that they did not favor societal system change: certainly the restorative laws that they developed had precisely that intent—and note that their strategy for bringing about societal system change was the institution of certain (restorative) laws. It is impossible to believe, however, that these writers believed that a perfectly egalitarian society *could* be created: by no means were they fools! Still, the presentation of these (exceedingly brief!) utopian discussions in the Old Testament must be regarded as a contribution to the Tradition, for they "authorize" us moderns to not only critique our society but develop our own visions of the Good Society (a sort of activity that was rather common during the nineteenth century³⁸), and generate ideas as to "how to get there."

³⁷In fact, in Deuteronomy 15:11 we read: "There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them." Note the "and so" here: "Address the neediness of others for the simple reason that it exists, and you can do something about it; don't expect any reward for doing it, just do it because it's the right thing to do."

³⁸See, e.g., Frank E. Manuel, editor, *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

Note that to say that there are *poor* people in a society is not the same thing as saying that there are *needy* people in that society. A “poor” person in an agricultural society can be thought of as one who does not *produce* enough for a comfortable life, for whatever reasons. *That* fact, however, does not mean that that person must therefore *consume* little. For if the little that he produces is supplemented with, e.g., food that is supplied (directly and indirectly) to him by others, he will still be a “poor” person—but will no longer be a *needy* one. Thus, there is no warrant whatsoever for Christians (or others) to interpret this passage in a way that justifies their refusal to do anything for the needy: rather than justifying apathy, acquiescence, this passage demands *action*!

A few paragraphs earlier I reached the conclusion that the writers of these five books (constituting the Pentateuch) had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent. This conclusion leads us another conclusion, one that is as surprising as it is important. In fact, the importance of this conclusion cannot be overstated. It is: **If it can be said that the Law had a *purpose*, this means that the various laws constituting the Law can—and should—be thought of not as *ends*, but as (mere) *means*.** This is a “bombshell” of a conclusion, of course, because it means that those—whether Christians or Jews—who have a fixation on the Law are, in effect, treating the Law as an idol!! (See, e.g., Deuteronomy 5:9.) They are failing to comprehend that there is a *goal* underlying the Law, that goal being the absence of physical neediness in the society.³⁹

Once one reaches this level of understanding, one can consider the question: Is there but *one* means to achieve a situation of “un-neediness”? Is the creation and promulgation of laws the only path to that sort of situation? Paul would add that there is more to it than that (as we shall see shortly). And the “utopia” discussion of a few paragraphs back suggests another means entirely: Work not to create/promulgate laws but, rather, work to bring about *societal system change* (under the assumption that law-generation will not achieve that end⁴⁰). Indeed, the reason I place Charles Fourier⁴¹ in the Tradition is not because he was a notably “spiritual” person but, rather, because he proposed the creation of “phalanxes”⁴²—i.e., small, rather self-sufficient communities—as (what might be termed) “building blocks” of a new society. That is, Fourier proposed an *institutional* solution to the problem. Which is not to say, however, that the

³⁹I am not, of course, saying here that a society should not establish certain rules, officers to apprehend rule-violators, courts to try the accused, and jails to punish the convicted (and/or programs to rehabilitate them). I *am* saying, however, that the legitimate *end* of laws is that of helping to minimize neediness in the society. Unfortunately, typically the elite of a society establish laws that they believe will further *their* interests, without any thought whatsoever to the existence of neediness in the society.

⁴⁰Actually, it would not be an end but, rather, a *means* to the end—of well-being, a lack of neediness.

⁴¹See, e.g., Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

⁴²Ripon, Wisconsin (which claims to be the birthplace of the Republican Party) began as a Fourier “phalanx” named Ceresco.

Bible fails to present such solutions. For what is the law of the tithe if not an institution? A different sort of institution than the one proposed by Fourier, true, but an institution nonetheless.

Once we come to understand the laws of the Old Testament as *means* rather than ends, we are in an intellectual position to make at least six further conclusions:

- Laws that appear in the Bible should not be embraced merely because of that fact. Rather, one should recognize that some of those laws tend to contribute to the end that I have identified here (i.e., minimal physical neediness), some do not. The former should be heeded, the latter should be ignored—the underlying principle here being that rules that are appropriate for one society at a given time may not be for another.
- Laws *other* than those appearing in the Bible may be relevant for us today. After all, our urban-industrial society has little in common with the sort of society that existed in Bible times.⁴³
- Means other than laws may be relevant for achieving the end. For example, working for societal system change (a topic that was very much “on the table” in the United States during the nineteenth century⁴⁴) may be a better way to occupy one’s mind and time than working to implement rules (including working to implement governmental programs). Granted that the restorative” laws of the Pentateuch obviously had as their intention bringing about societal system change; it does not follow, however, that those of us desiring today to bring about such change should think of law-generation as the appropriate path to such change.
- Although the focus of the Pentateuch seems to be on addressing physical needs, there is no reason why we should limit ourselves to such needs. Indeed, I will argue shortly that a notable part of Jesus’s contribution was that he was sensitive to the psychological and spiritual needs of others. Not that such sensitivity is not also present in the Pentateuch as well, however: As I argued in discussing laws which involve helping others in an indirect way, one can assume that behind such laws was recognition that people have self-esteem needs which must not be violated; there is a certain dignity in being human, and to impact that negatively is to commit a serious sin.
- The end of well-being need not be thought of just in terms of humans; there is no reason why animals cannot be included. Indeed, I would even assert that, e.g., geological features should be included—such as Devil’s Tower in Wyoming, drumlins in

⁴³See, e.g., Edward Alsworth Ross, *Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973 (with Introduction to the Torchbook Edition by Julius Weinberg). Originally published by Houghton, Mifflin and Company in 1907.

⁴⁴In the form of “utopian” novels, for example, such as Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*.

Wisconsin, etc.—the idea here being that given that we humans developed “in nature,”⁴⁵ we have a need for nature to be maintained, not desecrated.

- The end of reducing neediness itself can—and should—be challenged. That is, rather than thinking *just* in terms of working to reduce neediness (in all of its manifestations) in this world, we should recognize that today humans (and other animals) face a unique problem—the possibility that of the numerous (perhaps about 60%) species likely to be extinct by the end of this century, humans will be among them! Therefore, we should recognize that people (and other animals) can have well-being only if they *exist* (!), and should take “global warming” seriously, and work to address that problem with the seriousness that it deserves. Besides, it is well to keep in mind that “global warming” is not only a future threat to many species (including our own), but in the here-and-now is causing problems especially for the poor of our world.⁴⁶ One reason, indeed, why I advocate the creation of a new sort of religious service (I should say “meeting”!) is that I see such services as possible vehicles for finding answers to this problem. Answers that will be acted upon with intelligence and energy.

Thus, perceiving the laws of the Pentateuch as “mere” means—with not all of them even relevant for the end, and there being other (indeed *better*) means—is very liberating intellectually. Would that the Christians in our midst who are so fixated on, e.g., the Ten Commandments that they want them on public display everywhere would come to realize how misguided their viewpoint is. How lacking in true understanding of the Bible they are—to the extent that they sin by making an idol of the Ten Commandments!

The end that I have identified above is present in the Pentateuch, but one needs to *study* the Pentateuch carefully before this end becomes obvious. Is it present elsewhere in the Old Testament? Yes, it is present many places elsewhere (see the first Thomas L. Thompson book cited earlier), but I would like to conclude my discussion of the “Old Testament” (i.e., Hebrew Bible) by referring to just a few passages in “prophetic” books that support my thesis. First, in Hosea 6:5, 6 we find: “What I [God] want from you is plain and clear. I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices.” How does one love God? One loves God by obeying his commands—or, more generally, by doing his will. What is that? To work for, e.g., a situation within which there is no neediness of any type. Note that one way of perceiving this passage in Hosea is to regard it as Hosea’s summary, if not restatement, of the Law! So that Hosea’s Law contains just the law of loving God, and what *that* involves is doing God’s will—which is to work to eliminate neediness (such work being a form of worship).

Amos expressed much the same point of view. In Amos 5:21 - 24 we find: “The LORD says, ‘I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them: I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as

⁴⁵See, e.g., Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973; and also his posthumously-published (Paul died in 1996) *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998.

⁴⁶See, e.g., Dr. J. Matthew Sleeth’s website, www.servegodsavetheplanet.org.

offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.” What beautiful language! And what wonderful content!—that what God wants is that you treat your fellows well. We must keep in mind here, of course, that the “justice” that Amos was referring to was not the legalistic sort of justice that *we* think about, but justice in the sense of people getting what they deserve. And what is it that they deserve? They deserve to have their various needs met; thus, those of you whose needs *are* being met (and more) have an obligation to become aware of neediness among your neighbors, and somehow minister to that neediness—doing so constituting worship. Don’t be like a typical American (guided by the values of greed, materialism, and selfishness) and make your primary goal becoming a member of the Billionaire’s Club! In effect, then, Amos also introduced a new Law, consisting of just one positive ethical command: Do justice—which involves ministering to the neediness that exists around you.

Finally, let me close this discussion of the Tradition in the prophets by quoting (once more) a beautiful passage from Micah (6:6 - 8): “What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” In a sense we have a new point added here, for Micah is saying in effect that to be part of the Tradition is not only to do what God wants in *general* terms (i.e., work to eliminate neediness), but do what God wants in more *specific* terms. And, Micah seems to be saying, one can only gain knowledge regarding *that* by *communing* with God, by staying “in tune” with God—by being ever alert to *revelations* that God might choose to give one. This might be done via petitionary prayers wherein one petitions God for guidance; but might also be done, e.g., via the type of service introduced later and “meditative prayer”—the former discussed in some detail in Section B, the latter mentioned in Section B. Again, we in effect have with Micah a restatement of the Law, such that the Law is solely of a Tradition nature—i.e., the Law is about *proper* worship of God.

Micah’s allusion to communing with God raises the question: Does God only reveal truths to those who explicitly seek guidance from God? And in answering that question, I suggest that we consider the case of Samuel. In Chapter 3 of I Samuel we have that wonderful story of Samuel being called by God. Samuel had not *sought* anything from God; rather, God chose to speak to Samuel. The lesson here is that we should not be surprised if God reveals truths to certain people even though they have not asked God for revelations. I think here, for example, of Thorstein Veblen, one of the most creative social thinkers ever to have existed, in my opinion—and one of the great contributors to the Tradition. In reading his brilliant works one may not gain the sense that Veblen was a very spiritual man. In reading his biography (especially if read as a Type B person),⁴⁷ however, one learns that spiritual matters were uppermost in his mind—the suggestion being that he didn’t write about his ideas on such matters for publication because it would not have been fashionable (or “professional”) so to do.

⁴⁷Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*. New York: The Viking Press, 1934. See, e.g., p. 58.

In concluding my discussion of the Old Testament I feel compelled to quote what I regard as the most beautiful passage in the entire Old Testament—a passage that is “Traditional” if ever there was one: Job 29:12 - 17:

When the poor cried out, I helped them.

I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.

Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and

I helped widows find security.

I have always acted justly and fairly.

I was eyes for the blind,

and feet for the lame.

I was like a father to the poor

and took the side of strangers in trouble.

I destroyed the power of cruel men

and rescued their victims.

What we have here is another restatement of the Law, in effect. A restatement that is not only specific in content, but suggests that one should do God’s will not out of sense of obligation, or a sense that one will receive a reward, but a simple sense that it is a *privilege* to do God’s will. What a tremendous sentiment!

Which brings us to Jesus and his contribution to the Tradition. The first point I would make here is that to understand the nature of Jesus’s “ministry” one must understand an important feature of the situation into which Jesus was born. An aspect of that situation was the Roman presence, but much more important was religious developments that had been occurring in Jesus’s society. It appears that after the return from Babylonian Exile, thinking in Israel became less and less communitarian/societal in character and more and more individualistic. One manifestation of this change (devolution!) was that the covenant concept promulgated in Jesus’s time was an inverted—and therefore perverted—version of the Old Testament covenant concept. The Old Testament covenant concept was that if you (as a *people*) follow my laws (whose thrust is to minister to the needy), I (God) will bless you (as a *people*).

The version of the covenant concept taught in Jesus’s day, however, was subtly different—sufficiently different, however, to in effect *invert* the Old Testament covenant. For the new covenant was: If I as an individual am doing well, this is because I am being blessed by God; and *that* means that I am behaving in a fashion pleasing to God. On the other hand, if someone is needy, that person obviously is not being blessed, which means that he is behaving in a manner *displeasing* to God. If not the person in question, then some ancestor of the person. That is, a person is needy because he has sinned, or an ancestor had—a point brought out in the

amusing story of Jesus's healing of a man born blind in John 9.⁴⁸ Given such an interpretation of the covenant concept, one no longer had an obligation to *minister* to the needy. Rather, one now had a good reason to "*blame* the victim." One could now argue that the needy person had brought his problems on himself; so that not only did one not *need* to help the needy, but it might very well be *sinful* so to do!

Another factor that helps explain the nature of Jesus's ministry is his status as a "*mamzer*"—an Israelite of suspect paternity.⁴⁹ In fact, "stories about Jesus from the later Tannaitic period . . . claim that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a union between his mother Miriam or Mary and a Roman soldier variously called Pandera, Pantera or Panthera." Given that a tombstone of a Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera, who lived in Mary's time, has been discovered in Germany, it "is therefore just conceivable [pun intended?!] that this Pantera could have been Jesus'[s] true father."⁵⁰

Being a *mamzer* who was also rather intelligent, but of a lower class, Jesus would have been somewhat of an outsider, more alert to his societal situation than most of his fellows—and (therefore) more empathetic with those in need than most of his fellows. Also, in being an outsider he would have had time to reflect. And being intelligent, it is likely that early on he could sense that the societal situation was not as it should be—i.e., there should not be the stratification that he could readily observe. The critical occurrence in his life, however, was coming to know the content of Hebrew Scripture; for as he learned about God's will as expressed in Scripture, it became increasingly obvious to him that there was a serious disconnect between the Law and covenant in Scripture and what was being taught, in his time, by the "teachers of the Law."

Therefore, when he reached an age of sufficient maturity (likely about 30 years old), he resolved that, like (his cousin?) John the Baptizer (who may have been an Essene for a time?) he, too, needed to inaugurate a ministry. He saw his mission as being to:⁵¹

⁴⁸Is this story actually about *spiritual*, rather than *physical*, blindness?

⁴⁹Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 12.

⁵⁰Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 52.

⁵¹I do not deny herein that "Throughout the earliest accounts of Jesus'[s] words are found predictions of a Kingdom of God that is soon to appear, in which God will rule." (Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 128.) Indeed, Luke has Jesus assert (Luke 4:43) that his purpose was (not to die a sacrificial death on a cross to atone for our sins but, rather) to preach the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus, however, evidently convinced few people regarding this prediction, which prediction turned out to be a false one anyway. (Somehow this prediction of *God's* imminent coming got "converted," with some early Christians, into the prediction that *Jesus* would be returning "soon" (i.e., the Second Coming)—an expectation that one finds in all of Paul's extant letters.) Which fact would seem to suggest that Jesus should be of little interest to us today. One can, however, argue that Jesus's ministry is still relevant today in that the values he espoused are ones that we can accept today; and that because the Biblical "Kingdom" in "Kingdom of God" is best thought of as *kingship*, we moderns can retain Jesus's "Kingship of God" idea by arguing

- Educate his fellows as to the nature of the True Law of God (i.e., that love of neighbor is the fundamental law)—often using parables,⁵² such as the Good Samaritan parable of Luke 10:25 - 37. Perhaps the most notable, however, of Jesus’s teaching efforts is the famous “plan of salvation” passage in Matthew 25:31 - 45, a portion of which is (vs. 35, 36):

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.

These six “injunctions”—which constitute an “operationalization” of the love command attributed to Jesus—are repeated *four times*—obviously to make the point that “this is what my ministry is all about, folks! Maybe if I repeat myself enough times, you’ll get the point!” (Unfortunately, Christianity has *not*; and when, e.g., one is handed a tract containing a “plan of salvation,” it likely makes no reference whatsoever to this passage!!)

- Inform his fellows that they were being taught an inverted, and therefore fraudulent, version of God’s law (a point embedded, e.g., in the Good Samaritan parable). Matthew 23, in a sense, supports this fact, although what that chapter focuses on is “hypocrisy” (suggesting that the writer of that gospel lacked a good understanding of the “roots” of Jesus’s ministry). For example, Matthew 23:23: “How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty.”
- Do what he, as an individual, could do to address neediness in his society (e.g., heal and exorcize). Whether the healings/exorcisms reported in the gospels actually occurred,⁵³ the point is that the author’s intent in including these stories was to make it clear that he regarded Jesus as being in the Tradition.
- Preach the coming Kingdom of God. That preaching had two functions. First, it was an attempt on his part to motivate “haves” to change their thinking and behavior: by threatening them with the “bad news” that God was coming down soon, he hoped that they would change their ways out of fear regarding how God would judge them when He arrived. Second, it was an attempt to give the needy (false?) hope—the “good news” that when God came, their lot would definitely improve.

that one allows God to be one’s king if one follows God’s commands—with the commands relevant for today being one’s that are revealed today.

⁵²Note that Jesus’s “love of neighbor” command (e.g., Mark 12:29 – 31, derived from Leviticus 19:18) can itself be regarded as a sort of parable—given that it, like a true parable, demands interpretation.

⁵³It’s possible that some of the *stories* in the gospels referring to miracles performed by Jesus were based on *parables* that Jesus had told—the writer of the gospel not being aware of this fact.

It can be argued that Jesus not only tried to do what he could—directly and indirectly (via his preaching directed at “haves”)—to address the physical neediness present in his society, but also psychological/spiritual neediness. This point has, e.g., been pursued by Robert C. Leslie, who has examined a number of the encounters reported in the gospels involving Jesus in the light of logotherapy.⁵⁴ And related to this, Elton Trueblood,⁵⁵ e.g., has noted that the Jesus of the gospels often used humor, evidently recognizing thereby the healing power of humor. Conveniently, in his Appendix entitled “Thirty Humorous Passages in the Synoptic Gospels,” on p. 127, Trueblood listed the particular passages in the gospels that he had given attention in his book. The modern reader of these passages may, of course, fail to see the humor in these passages, for two reasons. First, we are separated in time by many centuries from the passages. Second, most of them are so familiar to us today that we give little thought to them.

One of the most relevant portions of the gospels for us moderns is found in John’s gospel, the references to a “Helper” in 14:15, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7. This “Helper” is identified as the Holy Spirit in 14:26. The significance of this reference is that the writer of John in effect is telling us that just as God had guided *Jesus’s* life, so is it possible that after Jesus’s departure, God—via the Holy Spirit—can guide *our* lives as well. (Meaning, e.g., that we should look to the Holy Spirit for guidance, rather than the Bible—a conclusion calculated to cause Martin Luther to turn in his grave!) This possibility is taken seriously by the service design I present in Section B—which is designed, in part, to “attract” the Holy Spirit.

The significance of these references to the Helper in John’s gospel should be recognized as the “bombshells” that they are. For they suggest that, on the one hand, one should not use the Bible as one’s authority—so that so-called “Bible churches” are, *by their very nature*, actually *unBiblical*! And suggest, on the other hand, that no individual (e.g., the Pope) should be treated as an authority either (a point solidified in Matthew 23, wherein Jesus is made to say that one should call no one Father except our Father in Heaven). Rather, one should look to present-day revelation—something the Quakers, for example, do, and something that underlies my service design.

I should add that my service design recognizes, with Paul, that the Holy Spirit can be looked to not only for guidance (i.e., ideas as to what to do) but for “possession”⁵⁶—an idea, by the way, not absent from the Old Testament. For in I Samuel 9:5 - 7 we find (Samuel speaking to Saul): “At the entrance to the town you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill, playing harps, drums, flutes, and lyres. They will be dancing and shouting. Suddenly the spirit of the LORD will take control of you, and you will join in their religious dancing and shouting and will become a different person. When these things happen, do whatever God leads you to do.”

⁵⁴*Jesus and Logotherapy: The Ministry of Jesus as Interpreted Through the Psychotherapy of Viktor [E.] Frankl.* New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

⁵⁵*The Humor of Christ.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964.

⁵⁶For a brilliant discussion of relevance here see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity.* New York: Continuum, 1995.

Paul recognized (Romans 7) that although in his *mind* he knew what he should and should not do, what he called his “human nature” (what today we might term his *socialized* nature) caused him to do what he abhorred, and to refrain from doing what he wanted to do. He added, however, that (Chapter 8) if one is filled with the Holy Spirit (which, v. 6, “results in life and peace”), one will be able to overcome one’s “human nature”—one’s supposedly innate sinful nature. And in Galatians 5:16 - 25 Paul wrote at some length regarding the behavioral contrast between being controlled by human nature as opposed to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, although Paul claimed to admire the Law (e.g., Romans 7:12 and 8:22), and Acts 22:3 has him claim that had studied under Gamaliel (a famous rabbi of the time), his letters give one no indication that he knew the first thing about the Law! So that although the Pentateuch is very definitely reflected in the gospels, it is not at all reflected in any of Paul’s letters.

Still, Paul must be recognized as an important contributor to the Tradition in that he recognized that it is not enough to have a set of rules: just because one has a thorough knowledge of what one should, and should not, do, it does not follow that one will be able to *follow* those rules. What one needs, in addition, is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that one’s behavior will be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, Paul, in his letters, provided no guidance as to *how* one can become Spirit-filled. But we need not regard that failure on Paul’s part as a serious one, for my service is designed to “attract” the Holy Spirit—to not only provide ideas/insights to participants, but to “possess” them—thereby changing (at least on a temporary basis) their personalities and behavior for the better.

In concluding this brief discussion of the New Testament, I would like to make reference to the rather prosaic Letter from James—which may not have been written by Jesus’s brother James,⁵⁷ but likely *does* express the views of many of the early (Jewish) followers.⁵⁸ At 1:27 James states: “What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.” In effect, James repeated Jesus’s injunction to love the neighbor, but in a more concrete form; and also recognized that there is a dominant worldview “out there” that guides most people, but must be resisted—because it is “out of tune” with the love of neighbor command. In addition, James makes the point that what’s important is to be *religious*—rather than a Jew, Christian, or whatever. Martin Luther had a low opinion of the Letter of James—but all *that* means is that he thereby demonstrated his inability (or was it unwillingness?) to discern the plain message of the Bible.

The Bible is a book (*collection* of books, actually) that is not only an object of study by scholars, but a book that is *used*—and in two rather *different* ways. Ways that are, in fact, virtual opposites one of the other. In labeling these two ways it is useful to borrow terms from theologian Delwin Brown—an *authorization* way, and an *authoring* one. Despite the fact that these two words have “author” in common, their meanings are polar opposites.

⁵⁷See, e.g., Jeffrey J. Bütz, *The Brother of Jesus and the Lost Teachings of Christianity*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005.

⁵⁸Gomes (*op. cit.*, p. 16) states, in fact: “Recent scholarship places the Epistle of James as first by date [of the books constituting the “New Testament”], followed by I Thessalonians.”

One who uses the Bible in the first way perceives the Bible as a *resource* that can be used to support a certain position and/or proposed course of action. One's starting point, then, is a position/action proposal, and one then proceeds to "mine" the Bible for passages that seemingly lend support to that position/action proposal. Underlying this use of the Bible, of course, is the recognition that the Bible is granted a certain degree of authority in our society, so that the Bible's value lies in its ability to provide authority to—i.e., to *authorize*—one's position/action proposal. The Bible comes into play here, then, only because one perceives it as playing a useful role—the "usefulness" here referring to one's personal interests, the interests of one's party, the interests of one's ideology, etc. Interests, in other words, are given priority here, with the Bible playing a supporting role. The authorization way of using the Bible, then, has much in common with the approach typically taken by lawyers in our society: a prosecuting attorney begins with the assumption that the person being prosecuted is guilty, and views his/her task as finding evidence in support of that position; a defense lawyer begins with the assumption that the defendant is innocent, and seeks evidence to establish that "fact" (or at least cast doubt on the defendant's guilt). In neither case is the orientation to discovering truth—just as with the Bible-user in the first category is there a lack of interest in discovering the truth of the Bible.

It is easy to gain the impression that most users of the Bible in our society are in the first category, but in fact there *are* some in our society who are in the "authoring" category. They may not be as vocal in expressing their viewpoints as those in the first category, but this is no reason for ignoring them. The starting point for "authoring" individuals is the Bible itself, rather than personal (etc.) interests. The authoring person is interested in knowing the content of the Bible, but not from the antiquarian's viewpoint—for the authoring person is searching not for knowledge *per se*, but *useful* knowledge—knowledge that can be used for guiding his/her life. This means that s/he wishes to arrive at a perspective regarding what the Bible is "about"—expressed in such a way that it can have meaning for his/her life. This implies that the authoring person will view the books comprising the Bible as having been written for the benefit of the authors' contemporaries, not us moderns—but that that fact does not mean that they are irrelevant for us moderns. Therefore, we need a conception of the Bible that enables us to see a "message" in it that has relevance for us today. We need, then, not a *summary* of the Bible, but an *interpretation* of it. It is not enough to memorize numerous passages in the Bible; it's not even enough thoroughly to internalize those passages in addition. For what one needs is an understanding of the Bible that can serve as a guide for one's *contemporary* life—an understanding that can serve to "author" one's life. One's goal here is to have the *Bible* (via a certain understanding of it) "write" one's life, rather than have one's life dictated by personal or other interests—with the Bible simply playing a supporting role.

Just as those who are in the authorizing camp can differ substantially in what positions/plans of action they are supporting with the Bible (and therefore in the particular passages they extract from the Bible), so can those in the authoring category differ substantially in how they "read" the Bible—i.e., how they perceive the Bible's basic "message." I recognize this fact, and therefore—as one who places himself in the second category—make no claim that my understanding is THE correct one. I do, however, believe that there is substantial merit in the position taken here—that the focus of the Bible is on worship (defined as specified earlier). That is, the Bible urges the view *that* worship is important, identifies kinds of people to whom worship activities should be directed, identifies kinds of worship activities, etc. Some would say

that the authoring sort of person should think of the Bible as being the authoring agent, but I prefer to take a wider view. My preference is to think of the *Tradition*, rather, as being the authoring agent, the Bible being an extremely important component of that Tradition, but not the sole component; for the Tradition began prior to Bible times, and has continued down to the present day. This perception enables us moderns to become a *part* of the Tradition, not just *observers* of it; we may very well celebrate the Tradition, but as members of the Tradition we must do more than celebrate it; we must *continue* it, even *extend* it.

Although it is important to have some knowledge of the (worship) Tradition as it existed in pre-Biblical times, and as it has existed since Biblical times, it is not my purpose here to focus on those periods. What I have done in this section is to focus solely on the Biblical period of the Tradition, indicating the multi-dimensional, sophisticated manner in which worship is treated in the Bible. I would add that the diversity involved in the Bible's treatment of worship can be thought of as giving us "permission" to expand on that provided in the Bible; so that, e.g., the institution I introduce in the next section can be thought of as having its roots in the Bible. Before proceeding to that discussion, however, it will be useful to summarize the points, regarding worship, that have been brought out in this section:

- A central theme of the Bible is that of worship, where "worship" is defined as engaging in activities that contribute to the well-being of others (and refraining from activities that would tend to contribute to the ill-being of other—i.e., "sins"). The "theory" here is that (1) ill-being exists in the society, (2) God is displeased with the existence of ill-being, (3) God is incapable of taking direct action to remove that ill-being, and therefore (4) is dependent on humans to act on His behalf.
- The Bible identifies various categories of people with which ill-being is associated—e.g., widows, orphans, the poor, the elderly. In many of these cases the *status* of the person (e.g., being an orphan, lame, blind) makes it apparent why the type of person in question has ill-being. And in many of those cases the implication is that the person in question has his or her status through no fault of their own—and *therefore* deserves assistance; that is, *why* the person has his/her status is relevant for *whether* s/he deserves assistance. In other Biblical passages, however, the matter of "why" does not seem to be relevant—the Job passage quoted perhaps being an example. Indeed, in the parable of the Good Samaritan it is natural to ask why the attacked man was so foolish as to travel the route he did, and alone at that. However, for the purposes of the parable, that fact has no relevance; the implication of the parable is that the injured man deserved to be given assistance for the simple reason that he needed it—with the greater message here being that we find it too easy to find excuses for not ministering unto the needs of others, and should address neediness without asking why it exists.
- Activities enjoined in the Bible—explicitly or by implication—are usually ones concerned with physical needs, but some of the activities recommended (ordered, actually) in the "Old Testament" are such that the self-esteem needs of recipients are recognized. And some of Jesus's actions (e.g., his "handling" of the woman-caught-in-adultery situation) indicates recognition on his part that people have "meaning" needs as well as physical ones; and his use of humor indicates that he recognized its healing

power.

- The issue of how to get people to act appropriately is addressed in two ways:
 - Laws are stated, specifying what one should, and should not, do; many of those laws are cultic in nature, but the ones of concern here are the specifically ethical ones. Although often interpreted as “fixed in marble,” it’s clear that they were promulgated as *means* to an end (increased well-being within the group), not ends in themselves, I argued above. The laws are a varied lot, varying in several respects:

There are *positive* laws: respect your parents, love your neighbor, provide for the poor neighbor. And there are *negative* (“don’ts”) ones: don’t mistreat foreigners, widows, or orphans.

The laws vary in degree of specificity. Some laws are rather *abstract*: show love for foreigners, don’t treat fellow Israelites harshly. Others are more *specific*: pay wages to those to whom you owe money before sundown, lend a fellow Israelite as much as he needs.

Some are *ameliorative* in orientation, examples of negative such ones being: don’t murder, steal, accuse others falsely. Other laws are of a more long-run, *restorative* nature: Hebrew slaves are to be set free in every seventh year, on each fiftieth year (“Jubilee” year) all land is to be restored to its original owner.

Most laws are *direct*: don’t commit adultery; don’t desire another man’s house, wife, or slaves; don’t require interest in loans to a poor man. However, a most interesting group of laws are *indirect*, subtle in their approach: observe the Sabbath, allow gleaning, land cannot be permanently sold.

- Motivational devices are mentioned, to prod people into following the laws.

The laws are attributed to God to give them force.

One is encouraged to repeat the laws often, to tie them on one’s arms, to wear them on one’s forehead.

The people are reminded of their past slavery in Egypt, so that they will develop empathy for those in need.

The Festival of Passover—to be celebrated every year—is instituted to remind the people of their ancestors’ (alleged) sojourn in Egypt, as slaves—again to keep them from forgetting this past slavery, with the hope that this will continually rekindle their empathy for those in need.

The Festival of Booths gives people time to reflect, in a situation of simple living, with close contact with their fellows in varied situations—the purpose again to prevent the fire of empathy from becoming extinguished.

Promises were offered for obedience, threats for disobedience.

- The story-telling associated with Jesus’s ministry represents a subtle approach to suggest appropriate behavior. Rather than involving the statement of commands, stories with “morals” were offered, these involving principles for guiding behavior—it being up to the hearers to infer what those principles were. Presumably Jesus believed that such an approach to motivating others to act appropriately would be more effective than issuing commands. Besides, given that God’s commands were already a part—central part, in fact—of Judaism, it would have been presumptuous of Jesus to have issued commands. Indeed, had he done so, he likely would have been accused, and convicted, of being a blasphemer.
- Obstacles to acting appropriately are identified—such as the “human nature” one identified by Paul, and the ideology one (the individualistic thought that enabled an inversion of the Law) that Jesus dealt with (e.g., implicitly in his Good Samaritan parable).
- A solution to overcoming those obstacles is identified, in the form of the Holy Spirit. This agent on the one hand can be a source (via “revelation”) of ideas regarding what worship activities to engage in, and how; it can also “possess” one, and thereby *enable* one to overcome “natural” tendencies to act contrary to God’s wishes (including by refraining from acting in accord with His wishes).

We have, then, in the Bible “worship” approached from a number of perspectives—which fact should embolden us. On the one hand it should encourage us develop an even more expansive concept of worship (so that, e.g., we come to understand addressing the problem of “global warming” as constituting worship); and, on the other hand, it should motivate us to develop ideas concerning what we can do to *help* us worship—such as the New Word Fellowship NeWF) discussed in the next section (which also gives passing attention to “meditative prayer”). It is time next, then, to use several perspectives in presenting a new meeting design that I term the New Word Fellowship.

Before doing so, however, let me briefly state in advance the relationship between the New Word Fellowship and worship: On the one hand, the NeWF should *prepare* participants for worship; this is, in fact, the primary purpose of this institution. In addition, though, participation in NeWF sessions *accomplishes* worship (and also may very result in development of the very concept of what constitutes worship⁵⁹). What I mean by this “accomplishing” claim is that participation in Fellowship sessions would be expected to contribute to the well-being of those involved; it would foster healing for those in need of (psychological) healing, and would enhance

⁵⁹And in terms of varying levels of specificity.

the well-being of those who already have a normal level of well-being. The next section will expand on these points—and more.

Meetings for Worship

As one who has been a churchgoer virtually all of my life, I have come to believe that if one would ask most churchgoers why they attend church, they would respond:

"We're here because,

"We're here because,

"We're here because

"We're here,"⁶⁰

That is, for most churchgoers, their churchgoing seems to be more a matter of habit than the result of purposeful decision-making. And although for some their churchgoing constitutes worship, I suspect that for many churchgoers their attending church services does not involve even that. That, rather, the reasons for attending church include the following:

- “Going to church ‘religiously’ will earn me ‘points;’ and if I earn enough points, I will not be spending eternity in a very warm place.”
- “The pastor has a wonderful personality, and tells amusing stories; I really like him!”
- “The pastor’s sermons have good intellectual content: they are provocative, well-organized, and even well-delivered. They sure beat the mouthings of the drones on the news programs on TV!”
- “The building in which services are held is awe-inspiring; I need to get away from the ugliness around me by regularly attending services at such-and-such church. Besides, there is no admission charge!”
- “I haven’t had a chance to play my clarinet since high school days, but because the church has a small orchestra, it has given me an opportunity to get back in the swing of things with my clarinet. Besides, it’s fun to be with the others in that group.”
- “The church’s choir gives me a chance to sing solos. I love to perform, because it makes me feel important: I like it when after the service someone compliments me on how beautiful my voice is.”
- “At my place of employment I’m just another grunt, but the church I attend has all sorts of committees, and I’m the chairman of one of them. Being the ‘boss’ for a change makes me feel like I’m a human after all, not just a cog in a big machine.”

⁶⁰Thorstein Veblen, *An Inquiry Into the Nature of Peace and the Terms of its Perpetuation*. New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919, p. 60. First published by The Macmillan Company in 1917.

- “I’m in such a habit of going to church (from my days as a child), that I just don’t feel right if I skip going to church on Sundays.”
- “Going to church gives me a chance to get away from my ‘job’ as a homemaker, and socialize a little.”
- “Given that I’m an alderman in the local government, it’s important that I be seen going to church. Thus, before and after services I try to shake hands and say ‘Hello’ to as many people as I can. That should help me get elected next time around.”
- “I’m from a large family, and most members of the family live here locally. Everyone in the family goes to church, and I would stand out like a ‘sore thumb’ if I didn’t follow suit. In fact, the others would start ‘hounding’ me if I didn’t attend church regularly. And if I stopped going entirely? Well, they would disown me, that’s for sure!”
- “I like to go to church and get involved with church activities because that’s a way of making important contacts. For example, if I can make friends with a plumber who goes to my church, perhaps he won’t ‘screw’ me if I call upon him for his services.”
- Etc.

As I stated earlier, church services don’t *involve* worship in a Biblical sense; and one can glean from the statements above that church services typically don’t even *prepare*—or prepare well—those attending them for worship activities.

The question that arises, then, is: Given a group of individuals who live in the same general area, who would like to give worship activities a more prominent role in their lives, who would like to meet with like-minded others and, finally, who would like those meetings to be *helpful* to them, from a worship perspective, how should they *design* their meetings? What principles should they follow as they proceed in their meeting design? I would suggest the following:

- The service⁶¹ should provide each attendee the opportunity to express his/her ideas regarding specific activities perceived as worshipful—whether those activities are ones that the speaker is thinking about for himself/herself; or ones of a collective nature, wherein the speaker is inviting others in the group to join in, if so inclined. Observation of this principle has, as one virtue, the advantage of enabling members of a congregation to become acquainted one with another. Conventional religious services (including “contemporary” ones) tend not to enable this to occur.⁶² In fact, not only does the typical service not contribute to feelings of community/solidarity within the group; it tends to contribute to the formation of cliques, and thereby animosity. (An ironic fact, I might

⁶¹I use the word “service” here rather than “meeting” because it is more familiar in this context. As I pointed out earlier, given that “worship,” in a Biblical sense, *involves* service, strictly speaking it is not appropriate to call religious meetings “services”—even if their purpose is the preparation of attendees for service/worship.

⁶² Having a “greeting” period does not—obviously—enable congregants to get to know one another.

add!) For if one's experience, in attending to church, consists only of listening to a minister speak and chatting with a few others during the coffee hour, one is deprived of an opportunity to become well-acquainted with any of one's fellow congregants.

- It should provide each attendee with the opportunity to *speak* on whatever s/he feels “called” upon to speak about—whether it is a personal matter, a congregational matter, a matter of foreign affairs, or whatever. Indeed, this includes a freedom even to speak on matters that are only tangentially—if at all—related to worship activities! Respect for the person is the guiding principle here, one that must be allowed to override all other principles.
- Corresponding with this opportunity to speak there should be an opportunity to *hear* what others have to say—whether or not that pertains directly, or even indirectly, to worship. An implication here is that one speaking must be allowed to speak without interruption—so that others are able to hear, and understand, what is being said.
- The opportunity to speak and listen should exist in a context in which interaction occurs. That is, people should have the opportunity to react to what others have said.
- This sort of interaction should occur in a situation that does not involve—or even allow, for that matter—exchanges that become heated. That is, interaction must proceed in an orderly manner that allows everyone to “have their say,” but in such a fashion that shouting matches do not occur—and walls are created: bridges are needed, not walls.
- Services should provide the opportunity for attendees to plan activities of a worship nature to be engaged in with members of the group.
- Services should provide an environment that strengthens the commitment of attendees to engage in worship activities.
- Related to this, services should energize those who attend them; they should, i.e., help attendees “recharge their batteries,” so that they will be better able to engage in worship activities throughout the coming week.
- Another way of stating this last point is that services should provide an environment that is inviting to the Holy Spirit—as a Being that can “possess” people, and thereby give them courage, energy, “aliveness,” etc.
- Given that the Holy Spirit can not only possess people, but reveal truths to them (as John’s gospel points out), services should be designed so that they conduce revelations to those in attendance.
- The environment of services should be such that they conduce the “knowledge” that God is a real, yet ultimately mysterious, Reality—about which little definite can be affirmed. One implication of this principle is that I see it as “telling” us that although music might very well be associated with services, this music should be wordless: there is wisdom in

the historic use of organ music in church services. Charles Wesley is often promoted as one who had a gift for writing lyrics for hymns; perhaps it is time, however, that we begin to reconsider the wisdom of congregational singing—and instead allow only instrumental music during services. Why? Because any given set of lyrics expresses a particular theological viewpoint, and therefore by its very nature will be incapable of appealing to all of the members of a diverse group. The reason this latter point is important is that a subprinciple here is that meetings should *not* be restricted to just those with a certain given theological perspective—a principle that deviates rather sharply from conventional practice.

- Services (or perhaps I should say meetings) should provide an opportunity to socialize with others in the group on an informal basis.

Although in the process of enunciating these principles I have made a few comments on how inadequately conventional services “measure up,” I will eschew further commentary—instead encouraging the reader (if s/he agrees with these principles) to apply the principles to the church services with which they have had experience. Rather than critiquing the conventional service, my interest is in presenting ideas for a new service design, and I begin that process below by making a few background comments.

1. Some Background Comments

Whereas those who led Christianity’s initial development had (being under the sway of Greek philosophical concepts) an orientation to *truth* (with its associated intolerance, persecution, and violence), the nature of Jesus’s “ministry”—and specifically his use of the parable—indicates (it seems to me) that Jesus’s orientation, rather, was to *people*. How so? The first point to recognize here is that a parable, *by its very nature*, has no single, objective meaning.⁶³ If it did, there would be no point in conveying one’s message to others in such an indirect way.⁶⁴ This fact that parables, *by their very nature*, lack a single meaning—and therefore potentially have as many meanings as there are hearers of them⁶⁵—was, I believe, recognized by Jesus (at an unconscious level, at any rate); and it was for this very reason that Jesus chose to teach using parables.

⁶³See Schuyler Brown’s perceptive comments in *Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today*. New York: Continuum, 1998, p. 23.

⁶⁴I should note, however, that a number of years ago Hugh J. Schonfield argued that Jesus “spoke in parables so that the spies and informers who made it their business to be present wherever crowds gathered round a public speaker would be unable to detect anything subversive or inflammatory in what he said.” *The Passover Plot*. New York: Bantam Books, 1969, p. 74. Originally published in 1966 by Bernard Geis Associates. A 40th anniversary edition of this book was published in 2005 by The Disinformation Company.

⁶⁵*More*, in fact—for in my own experience I have found more than one way of interpreting the Good Samaritan parable, for example.

Jesus's use of the parable in teaching indicates to me that he knew that people were not merely different physically and behaviorally, but different in how they *thought*. And because Jesus believed that humans were created by God, he therefore "knew" that human diversity—including intellectual/mental diversity—was *good*.⁶⁶ Given his appreciation of human diversity, it is not at all surprising that Jesus used the parable in his "preaching." For:

- A parable encourages each hearer to derive an interpretation of the parable that has meaning for that person.
- Given, however, that a parable is a puzzle, and is likely to be so perceived, each hearer is likely to come to see his/her interpretation as tentative.
- Given this, the hearer of a parable is encouraged to realize that other hearers of a given parable not only likely interpret the parable differently, but also tentatively.
- Given *that*, a hearer of a parable may very well (depending on one's personality) feel motivated to ask other hearers how *they* interpret the parable—so that one may broaden and deepen *one's own* interpretation of the parable.
- In the process of this interaction with others, one may very well develop a feeling of tolerance—and even love—for others, and the group itself may develop a feeling of community.
- In the process of this interaction, spiritual growth on the part of each individual may also very well occur.
- Because a parable is easily committed to memory, it invites continual *re*-interpretation by each hearer, which means

In short, not only is use of the parable a teaching method that (unlike the dialogical method used by Socrates) tends to promote harmony and minimize violent behavior on the part of hearers; in so doing it tends to *cause* the very sort of behavior that it *advocates*.⁶⁷ So that Jesus's Good Samaritan parable, e.g., not only *illustrated* the "love of neighbor" law⁶⁸ that Jesus identified as central, but tended to *cause*, in a complex way, such behavior on the part of hearers. What genius!!

⁶⁶Paul's reference, in I Corinthians 12:12 - 31, to followers of Jesus as being analogous to the different parts of a body (specifically, Jesus's body) conveys the same idea.

⁶⁷Assuming, of course, that it *does*, in fact, teach love (if but indirectly).

⁶⁸This is not to say that that's *all* it did. One can argue that the Good Samaritan parable critiqued the religion of Jesus's society, was a critique of the book of Job, etc., etc.

My own personal opinion is that where Christianity as a formal religion especially is deficient today is in its *services* (which is why I am writing this). Attempts have been made to correct that deficiency through the introduction of “contemporary” services. But the “contemporary worship” service movement can be criticized on a number of grounds,⁶⁹ and my own conviction is that that movement is not the answer to Christianity’s problems—for it ignores the question of *why* we should meet in the first place. What I offer herein as an alternative to the “contemporary” service is a new institution, the *New Word Fellowship*. This is a recommendation that could be implemented either by existing churches (not too likely!), or by those who have exited their (Christian) churches—or those who are, and have been, unchurched. Although I do not herein explicitly propose the creation of a new religion, *in effect* I do, I suppose.

A given congregation that is formed might decide that its services should consist just of New Word Fellowship sessions; or might, rather, decide that Fellowship sessions would be featured in its services, but that its services should also contain elements in addition to Fellowship sessions. (Or it might begin by just having Fellowship sessions, and at a later date add other components to its services—and from time to time make changes in the character of its services.) At any rate, Subsections 2 - 5 below focus on the New Word Fellowship *apart* from what role it might be given in a larger service. Subsections 2 - 4 discuss various characteristics of the Fellowship, with Subsection 5 next identifying consequences that can be anticipated for Fellowship sessions.

2. Introductory Remarks

The New Word Fellowship is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France);⁷⁰ a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries;⁷¹ and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a Fellowship my personal experience with the adult “Sunday school” class at the church that I have been attending since 1980. The group has consisted of individuals who have certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group has his/her unique personality, each has had different life experiences, different educational levels are represented, etc. The group is not a random sample of American society, of course, but still is rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views are represented. Despite the latter fact, we all have felt free to express our views (so long as they

⁶⁹See, e.g., A. Daniel Frankforter, *Stones for Bread: A Critique of Contemporary Worship*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

⁷⁰Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 41-43.

⁷¹Medicine Story, “Circles of Freedom,” *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, “Calling the Circle,” *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox “out of the blue.” How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

are not too “heretical”!), because we know that the others in the group would respect them; for there has been a general consensus in the group that we are all “seekers,” and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I have led this group at various times, and have, during those periods, attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. So that when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes’s *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (cited earlier), I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group has been extremely important in my own spiritual development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves), and until recently I have attended these Sunday sessions “religiously.”

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as “love the neighbor” is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a “fleshing out” of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps “energize” them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a “natural high”) during a given Fellowship session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to have a “high” that lasted continuously for over three months.⁷² I don’t know why I was granted this valuable experience,⁷³ but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon

⁷²In addition, two books have given me a “natural high”: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: New American Library, 1958. First published by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1904. Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912. I read the first book in 1959, the second in 1984.

⁷³During that period my perceptions changed so that, e.g., I was perceiving differences in *kind*, but not *degree*. I recall, e.g., talking to a young woman during that period, encouraging her to run for a local political office. She responded that she felt that she was somewhat of a freak in being rather tall. Up to that point I had not noticed that “fact” about her. The “lesson” that I learned from that experience is that although it is “natural” to perceive differences in kind, such is not the case for differences in degree: such differences are ones that our minds *impose* on reality.

cross-culturally and historically.⁷⁴ And, second, believe that such an experience was common with the first “Jesuans.”⁷⁵

3. Preliminaries

What is a New Word Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

Participants in a given Fellowship meet at a specified place on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”⁷⁶); they write their name on the slip, then give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random⁷⁷) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one Fellowship session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a Fellowship is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four Fellowship sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first Fellowship, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of sortilege (i.e., a random procedure). This means not only that participants in a Fellowship do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who

⁷⁴See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

⁷⁵For a brilliant discussion see Stevan L. Davies, *op cit*. See in particular Chapter 12 (“The Christian Cult,” pp. 170 - 87).

⁷⁶The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

⁷⁷Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense).⁷⁸ Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The Fellowship, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a Fellowship all accept Jesus’s love of the neighbor command as their central “creed,” the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to that creed.⁷⁹

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they will be seated in a circle, and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity.⁸⁰ It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop”⁸¹ passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet’s immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the

⁷⁸See, e.g., writings by Michael Parenti and G. William Domhoff.

⁷⁹I am reminded here of Matthew Fox’s statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. (*Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 (“Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey”).

⁸⁰In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to NeWF participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his previously-cited *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. For example, Shepard states (p. 155): “Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself.” Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have “designed” us for such an activity.

⁸¹Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus symbolizing well the goal of a New Word Fellowship to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, *Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

4. Guiding Principles⁸²

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during Fellowship sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above premises and conclusions; i.e., at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept as a truism that one person's views are as worthy of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.
- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one’s truth”⁸³ and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
- d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth;

⁸²Compare with Paul's comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

⁸³This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a “talking hoop” (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.

- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given NeWFian congregation will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the service—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given congregation (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Fellowship are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the New Word Fellowship, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the Fellowship is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the Fellowship has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.⁸⁴

⁸⁴One with a scientific background might say that the New Word Fellowship represents an “operationalization”—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

5. Expected Outcomes

In this section I identify and discuss major consequences that I associate with participation in Fellowship sessions, doing so using two different approaches—first a *generic* approach (i.e., one that focuses on *types* of consequences), and then a *genetic* (i.e., *causally*-oriented) one.⁸⁵ I might add here that if there is magic in ritual,⁸⁶ then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture.”⁸⁷ The “magic” in a New Word Fellowship, it seems to me, lies in one’s being aware of the possible consequences associated with participation in a Fellowship. That is, if one knows in advance what effects participation in a Fellowship may have on oneself, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one’s thinking and behavior, foreknowledge of possible consequences of participation can also impact one’s thinking and behavior.

Let me begin here by noting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher Max C. Otto,⁸⁸ in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the New Word Fellowship because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in Fellowship sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of

⁸⁵I might note here that I see Fellowship sessions as involving *ritualized* discussion, and believe that that ritualization has important—and multitudinous—consequences. Relevant here is Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. On p. 71 Driver asserts that the “major functions of ritual . . . [are] making and preserving order, fostering community, and effecting transformation.” Driver then devotes Chapter 7 to “Order” (pp. 131 - 51), Chapter 8 to “Community” (pp. 152 - 65), and Chapter 9 to “Transformation” (pp. 166 - 91).

⁸⁶Driver, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899.

⁸⁸*The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life*. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V (“Realistic Idealism,” pp. 128 - 53).

creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a Fellowship fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below under two headings. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

Outcomes: Generic Approach

I have already made a few comments on outcomes, but below discuss them in more detail, using first a *generic* approach—doing so under three headings: intellectual, sociological, and personal. After having used that approach, I use a *genetic* one.

Intellectual

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a Fellowship would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a Fellowship, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the Fellowship in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a Fellowship proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the Fellowship—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the Fellowship's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a Fellowship as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a Fellowship—the individual “crazinesses” will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.”⁸⁹ (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

⁸⁹See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, “Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy,” in *Modern Therapies*, edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

Sociological

Precisely because I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from Fellowship sessions, I believe that there will be sociological implications. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the Fellowship has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the Fellowship’s design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the Fellowship is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

Personal

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a Fellowship can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking one’s mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one’s interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one’s claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control⁹⁰ others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies⁹¹ may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a Fellowship will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the Fellowship as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

⁹⁰They may perceive this as exercising “leadership,” rather. That is, they may put a positive “spin” on their objectional behavior.

⁹¹For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will experience improvement in their physical,⁹² emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the Fellowship experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.⁹³ And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective⁹⁴) blasphemous.

⁹²Including psychosomatic ones. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man’s Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

⁹³Few Christians seem to understand the fact that “God” can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept see Daniel C. Maguire, “More People: Less Earth: The Shadow of Man-Kind,” in (pp. 1 - 63) *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four (“God: The Heart of Reality”) in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

⁹⁴See Raymond Panikkar, “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

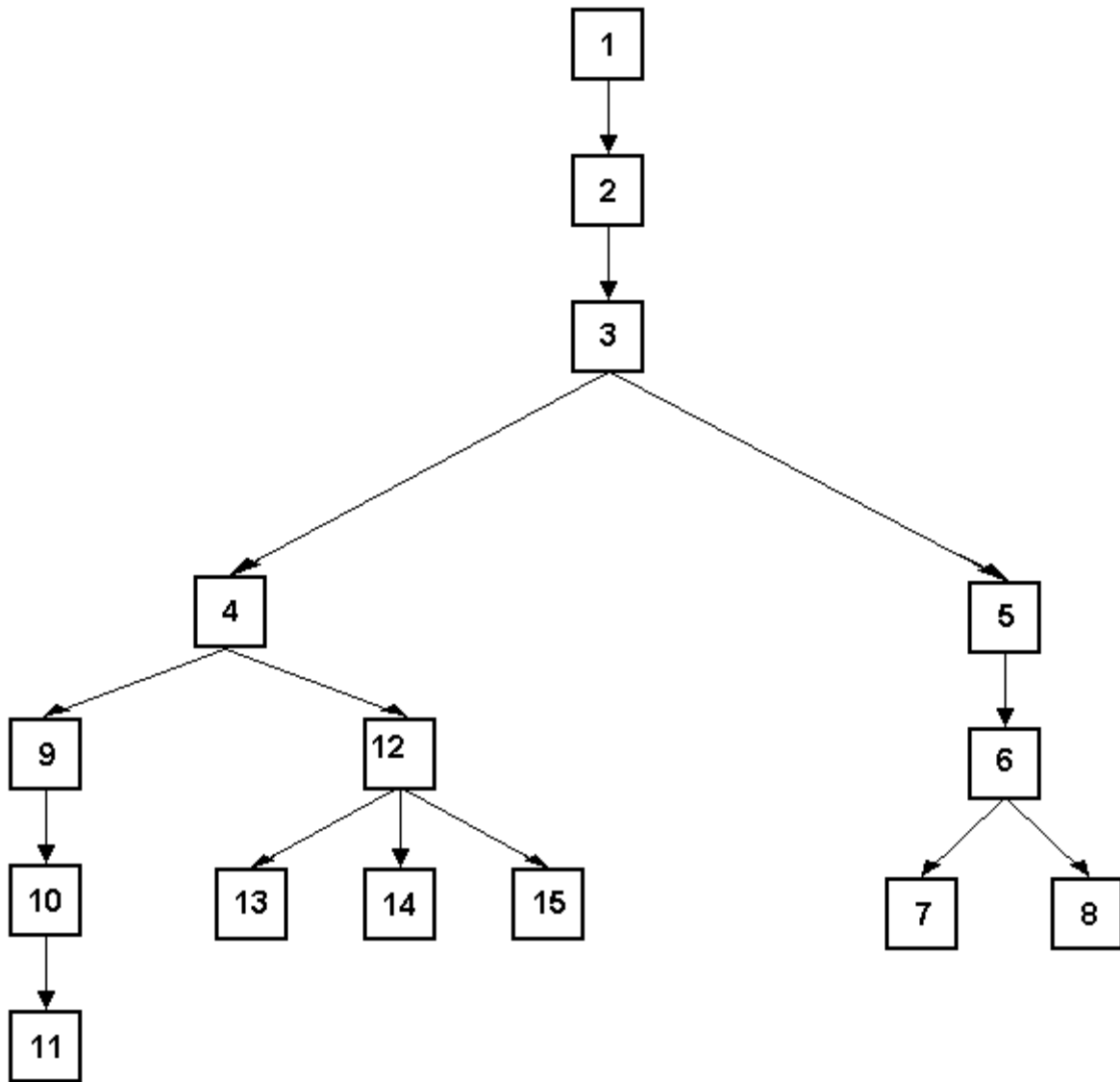
Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.⁹⁵ On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit; and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity “out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as also constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Outcomes: Genetic Approach

To further comment on consequences associated with Fellowship participation, let me next use a different approach (one focusing on causal relationships), basing my discussion on the following diagram (next page).

Each numbered comment below refers to the corresponding number on the diagram. The discussion that follows is intended to complement that given earlier in this section, not duplicate it. Overlap exists between the two discussions, but some important points made earlier are not repeated below; and, on the other hand, the discussion below adds some points not made above. Together, the two presentations should give the reader a fairly clear picture of the consequences that I foresee for Fellowship sessions. If I discuss only *positive* consequences, that is because that’s all I foresee!

⁹⁵Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and the movie *Groundhog Day* (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are systems, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the society and the dominant value system associated with those “peopling” the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, but this is not the place to present that strategy.



1. During the course of a Fellowship session creative ideas (i.e., new understandings, insights, ideas regarding what certain individuals or the group might do, etc.) may be received by one or more participants. At any rate, different perspectives are likely to be presented, and the various thoughts spoken (whether or not original to the speaker) can be thought of as pieces of a puzzle.⁹⁶

2. During some sessions a creative idea will occur to someone that results in putting these various pieces together to form a complete picture. This will not occur in all sessions—perhaps not even in most sessions. But it *will* occur in some sessions—especially once participants gain some experience with the Fellowship as an institution.

⁹⁶But not pieces capable of being put together in just one way. In that respect, the analogy here is not a perfect one. (*None* are, of course!)

3. That picture—i.e., that consensus—will be recognized by each participant as a good idea—a great idea, in fact. And because each will realize that s/he has made some contribution to that consensus, all will develop a strong commitment to that consensus.
4. That realization will produce in at least some participants a “natural high,” an altered state of consciousness. With some having such an experience, the “high” will last only briefly; with others, it will continue for hours, even days—perhaps until the next Fellowship session. The consequences of this altered state of consciousness are discussed under points 9 - 15 below.
5. Achievement of a consensus likely will result in the development of a strong sense of solidarity, “community,” within the group. A feeling that one’s own personality has merged with the group—yet that one retains one’s distinctiveness as an individual as well.
6. Gaining a sense of Oneness with the others in the group will also result in a feeling of well-being on the part of all members of the group. That is, all will develop feelings of enthusiasm, optimism, energy, “aliveness,” a sense that one is a choice-maker in control of one’s destiny, etc. Of course, the individuals comprising the group will have different personalities, so the feelings they develop in response to the achievement of consensus will vary.
7. If the consensus reached concerns an action to be engaged in by the group as a group, the feelings of well-being and enthusiasm will ensure that the action is performed well and expeditiously.
8. The feeling of well-being engendered by the consensus achieved will contribute to the physical, emotional, and mental health of each of the participants.
9. If the achievement of a consensus by the group results in a “natural high” on the part of a given participant (it may occur to several, even all), that person’s perceptions may be altered—in that the person may begin to perceive that “there is more in Heaven and Earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy” That is, the person may begin to perceive things not just as consisting of matter, but also an intangible something that might be termed “spirit.” Some will limit this perception to other people; others will limit it to animate beings; still others will begin to perceive “spirit” even in inanimate things such as rock formations.
10. Insofar as one perceives “spirit” in something, one will develop a feeling of respect—even reverence—for that thing. One may even perceive it as holy—as has occurred with many mountains, including the Black Hills in South Dakota.
11. That attitude toward other things will have behavioral implications for the one with such a perception in that s/he will not consciously engage in hurtful behavior directed toward things that are respected. One may even engage in *positive* behaviors toward them, including worshipful behaviors.
12. The experience of an altered state of consciousness may affect one’s conception of Deity (if one has such a conception). The conventional way of conceiving Deity in our society is as a discrete, transcendent Being given the name God. But the experience of a “high” may change one’s conception of Deity—even to the extent that one no longer finds the name “God” as an

adequate name for Deity. For one may, e.g., come to conclude (Buddhist-wise) that *naming* Deity is itself blasphemous!

13. One who believes in Deity may come to see the consensus reached as being a *revelation* from Deity (i.e., John's "Helper"⁹⁷). This means that one continues to perceive Deity as a discrete, transcendent Being, but now is asserting that one does not accept the theory that the Christian Bible uniquely embodies God's revelation. With the Quakers one now "recognizes" that God is *not* dead (as the Biblicists imply), is still alive, and still reveals Truths to humans. And although one continues to think of God as a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to think that God's *only* role in today's world is reveal Truths to humans—so that, e.g., so-called "acts of God" are not such, and that the very concept of "acts of God" is blasphemous.

14. One's "natural high" may be interpreted as "indwelling"—even "possession"—by God as Holy Spirit. Which may cause one to believe that when Paul was writing about being filled with the Holy Spirit, he was referring to what some would call a "natural high" experience. Note that in this case one is thinking of God not as a discrete, transcendent Being, but as an amorphous "ghostly" something that can be present in humans. What we have here is a "God as Presence" concept of God, a God that is *experienced* rather than a God that *does*, or has done, things (e.g., create things). Given the latter, a person who has come to conceive God as Presence is unlikely to think of God as, e.g., a *creator* of things, and is therefore likely to think of the current controversy involving the teaching of evolution as sadly misguided. That those who argue for Creationism/Intelligent Design are spiritually immature individuals whose thinking about spiritual matters utterly lacks depth.⁹⁸

15. If one comes to perceive spirit in all (or many) things (point 9), one may (but need not) equate that spirit with Deity—so that one comes to think of Deity in terms of *immanence*. That is, one comes to think of Deity as an all-pervasive Something that "inhabits" all things. One developing such a view would not only come to have *respect* for all things, but *reverence*. And if one not merely has respect for things, but reverence, one will be even less likely to engage in harmful behavior toward them. And if one *must* kill other living things to sustain oneself, one may feel that one must perform a ceremony first, and perhaps a ceremony afterward that expresses one's thanks. Because in this case one thinks of Deity as definitely other than a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to conclude that any attempt to personify—or even name—Deity is blasphemous.

It is conceivable that a Fellowship participant could move into category 13, or 14, or 15. For that matter, a participant could move into categories 13 and 14, *or* 13 and 15, *or* 14 and 15—*or* even 13, 14, *and* 15. There are several possibilities here. Especially if one moves into all three categories does it become possible for one to come to believe—paradoxically—that Deity is both knowable and unknowable at the same time! This is not, note, a conclusion that one can reach in

⁹⁷See, e.g., John 14:26 and 15:26.

⁹⁸Of relevance here is John F. Haught, *Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003.

“ordinary consciousness” using common sense. It is the sort of conclusion that one can reach only if one has had certain experiences.

Despite the fact that participation in a Fellowship likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a Fellowship will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked”⁹⁹ Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a New Word Fellowship can one experience Deity in our society,¹⁰⁰ I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience.”¹⁰¹ A New Word Fellowship, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a Fellowship can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the Fellowship. If New Word Fellowships involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to humankind’s survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind’s very existence is currently being threatened by “global warming,” among other factors.¹⁰²

Those familiar with feminist theological/religious literature will know that that literature emphasizes experience. For example, theologian Sheila D. Collins has noted (in discussing Mary Daly) that a “group of women at a Grailville theology conference,” in writing down words “which expressed for them a sense of the meaning of God in their lives,” wrote such words as energizing, empowering, grounding, being, creating, etc.¹⁰³ In other words, they thought of God

⁹⁹“The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

¹⁰⁰L. Robert Keck has introduced “meditative prayer” as an alternate “path to the Spirit.” See his *The Spirit of Synergy: God’s Power and You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his Chapter 7 (“Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime”), refers (p. 125) to “the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about,” and (p. 126) hitting the wall in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

¹⁰¹Marraine C. Kettell, “Becoming Ourselves,” a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

¹⁰²See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

¹⁰³*A Different Heaven and Earth*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974, p. 218.

in *verb* terms rather than *noun* terms. Thus, my discussion here of the New Word Fellowship may resonate with women more than men (who, I believe, tend to think of Deity as a person-like being—i.e., in *noun* terms). However, it seems to me that *both* men and women have narrow concepts of God, and that participation in a New Word Fellowship would help both develop a more sophisticated (if amorphous) concept of God.

It should go without saying that participation in a Fellowship would place one squarely in the Judeo-Christian tradition. George E. Tinker has noted that the imperative *metanoite*, usually translated as “repent,” is better translated as “return to God”—i.e., “recognize the divine hegemony, . . . return to the ideal relationship between Creator and the created.”¹⁰⁴ Insofar as the key personages in the Judeo-Christian tradition have striven not only to themselves establish a close relationship with Deity, but help their fellows develop a closer relationship with Deity (and in a multi-faceted way), the New Word Fellowship is clearly in that Grand Tradition (unlike Christianity!).

Note, though, that a complex concept of “God” is associated with the New Word Fellowship (and in that respect is not unlike the Christian Bible!).¹⁰⁵ In some contexts (i.e., when one senses that one has received a revelation), one may conceive “God” as a discrete, transcendent Being. In other contexts (i.e., when one is experiencing a natural high), one may not so much *think* about what “God” is like, but *experience* “God” as a Presence (which one, like Paul of Tarsus, may refer to as constituting indwelling by the Holy Spirit). And in still other contexts (i.e., when one perceives Spirit in other people and/or things), one may think of “God” as an amorphous Something that is immanent (if one invokes the God-concept at all, that is). This latter God-concept is usually given the label “pantheism;” note, however, that it is given that label by those who not only conceive God as a discrete, transcendent Being, but tacitly assume that that’s the only way “God” *can* be conceived. By, that is, narrow-minded people who, because *they* think that way, find it easy to condemn those who *don’t* think their way as atheists, and treat them as if they had never heard of the “love of neighbor” command.

From the above discussion it should be clear that those who have for some time participated in a New Word Fellowship likely would not apply the label “panentheists” to themselves. For they are likely to regard this label that as a mere intellectual construct, one created by people who ostensibly would like to “think outside the box” imposed by their transcendent view of “God” but, in not having *experienced* anything that might be labeled Deity, are unable to escape their intellectual box.

Earlier, I introduced a graphic figure and stated that it was the “B” concept of worship that was Biblical rather than (the more conventional) “A” concept; that, in fact, the “A” concept should be thought of as not simply different from the “B” concept, but its *inverse*—its exact opposite. At

¹⁰⁴“Creation as Kin: An American Indian View,” in *After Nature’s Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 151.

¹⁰⁵I should perhaps note that Jack Miles has discovered 24 different concepts of (or at least *roles* for) God in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., our “Old Testament”). See his *God: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

this point, however, let me qualify the earlier statement by noting that although the New Word Fellowship, as an institution, on the one hand reject—and utterly—the Servant concept of “God,” this does not mean that it embraces, rather, the Master concept. As I have emphasized in this section, the Fellowship participant likely associates different concepts of Deity with different contexts. Potentially three different concepts, in fact. One might say, therefore, that Fellowship participants (some of them, at any rate) would be trinitarians, but in an unconventional way¹⁰⁶--one that actually has some *meaning* for them!

Final Thoughts

My discussion of the New Word Fellowship has, it will be noticed, focused solely on the Fellowship as a discussion group, which suggests the question: Would meetings (“services”) of participants in a Fellowship consist just of discussions? And my answer is that although discussions (following the procedures outline above) would be the heart of meetings, NeWFian services might very well include much more than that: it is up to participants in a given NeWFian group to decide for themselves what (if anything) should take place during services besides discussions.

It is certainly possible, for example, that members of a given such group would engage in certain collective activities prior to discussion sessions. (Recall that any given discussion group would contain about 12 people, so that if a given NeWFian group had, say, 144 members, and all members were present on a given meeting day, those members would divide into 12 Fellowships that day.) For example, a period might be devoted to announcements, another to music (but instrumental music only, as I stated earlier), another to readings, still others to rituals developed by and for that group, etc. And after discussion sessions had concluded, there might be a period for socializing, with refreshments. While activities were going on for the adults there would be infant/child care, and some sort of educational program for school-age children. Again, I am simply trying to be suggestive here; any given NeWFian “congregation” would make its own decisions as to the nature of its “services.”

This fact of “congregational” autonomy does not mean that different NeWFian groups in the same area might not maintain contact one with another to share ideas, etc.—that, in fact, a “denomination” of sorts might not even develop. That, i.e., an umbrella organization might be formed that would, e.g., serve as a resource center for a group of NeWFian congregations—with a “bureaucracy” becoming attached to such a center. A control hierarchy would not, however, develop, given that members of any given congregation would prize diversity, and lack a pathological need to dictate to others how to think and act.

The fact that those attracted to NeWFism would, of necessity, be people who welcomed diversity in the others with whom they had contact (and that participation in Fellowships would itself help people become tolerant) does not mean that conflicts would never arise in a given NeWFian congregation. I would hope, however, that members of any given congregation would be able to deal well with internal conflict, and in most cases be able to resolve whatever problems had

¹⁰⁶For an example of the level of inanity to which conventional discussions of the trinity can descend, see Adelle Banks (of Religion News Service), “In Gender Debate, Jesus is ‘Subordinate,’” *Christian Century*, Vol. 124, no. 4 (February 20, 2007), pp. 12 - 13.

arisen. The fact of the matter, however, is that people differ in intelligence, in the degree to which they are mentally ill, in their experiences, etc., so that cases will arise where resolution of conflicts is not possible. In that case what I hope would happen is that a member who does not “fit in” would not simply leave the Fellowship, but leave it and form another congregation. For there can't be too many NeWFian congregations!

But will NeWFism be able to compete in the current “religious market” wherein the megachurches seem to be the “fittest” churches around? In answering this question, let me begin by noting that several decades ago sociologist Philip E. Slater suggested that there are “three human desires that are deeply and uniquely frustrated by American culture:

- (1) The desire for *community*—the wish to live in trust and fraternal cooperation with one’s fellows in a total and visible collective entity.
- (2) The desire for *engagement*—the wish to come directly to grips with social and interpersonal problems and to confront on equal terms an environment which is not composed of ego-extensions.
- (3) The desire for *dependence*—the wish to share responsibility for the control of one’s impulses and the direction of one’s life.”¹⁰⁷

I’m not so sure that I agree with Slater's third “desire,” but would add to his list that many in our society recognize that they have certain talents, would like to develop those talents, but also feel the pressures of “career”—and are therefore forced to suppress such a desire. I believe that the success of the megachurches has little to do with the “conservative” theology that they expound, and much to do with the fact that they recognize (if but implicitly) that there are unmet desires “out there” (especially in suburbia), and have designed programs designed to “minister” to those unmet desires. In fact, some of those who have initiated megachurches have consciously used marketing techniques—as if they were selling cereal, not Jesus! Indeed, as one who has been inspired by the Grand Tradition implicit in the (Christian) Bible, I have difficulty perceiving just how these megachurches relate to that Grand Tradition!

I have no difficulty in seeing NeWFian congregations as a part of that Tradition, however. More pertinent for the present topic of “success,” however, is the fact that I believe that NeWFism can address well the needs and desires of the contemporary USan (i.e., citizen of the United States). One must, of course, have a sincere interest in spiritual matters to become a Fellowship participant (a quality that may be lacking in many of those attracted to megachurches). And one must have the mental flexibility to be able to “think outside the box,” so far as one's ideas of “proper” services are concerned. Having studied the phenomenon of the diffusion of innovations, I know that the early stages of development are likely to involve “slow going” for any “NeWFian movement.” However, once such a movement would achieve a certain “critical mass,” there is the potential that it would begin to “take off,” and become a significant force within U.S. society (among other societies).

¹⁰⁷ *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 5. I am in awe of the brilliance of this book.

The final point I would like to make is that I do not expect participants in Fellowships to just engage in talking. Rather, I expect varying sorts of activities (“outreach” and other) to occur on the part of NeWFians, each congregation making its own decisions on this matter—and with a “central office” (if one is established) acting as a resource.¹⁰⁸ For given that the “love of neighbor” command would be a central one for NeWFians, of necessity would members be “activists.” In fact the motto of any particular Fellowship should be: “Yes, I *am* my brother’s keeper!”

Because of the potential benefits—individual and societal—that can result from participation in a New Word Fellowship, I am hopeful that some of those who become aware of the proposal advanced herein will find it not only attractive, but compellingly so; and because they are also in substantial agreement with the Biblical basis that I provide for the proposal, feel “led” to “pick up the ball, and go with it.” That would not only make me happy; doing so by a number of people—and soon—might very well be the key to humankind’s “salvation”¹⁰⁹ from the threat of global ecocatastrophe. For humans would thereby be partnering with God—and as has been said (Matthew 19:26), with God, all things are possible.

¹⁰⁸For example, I would hope that NeWFians would recognize that our society must—and beginning yesterday!—move decidedly in a “green” direction, and would begin acting on that belief. See, e.g., Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

¹⁰⁹The term “salvation” is usually used in conjunction with the afterlife. Here, however, I use the term in a more Biblical (i.e., here-and-now) sense, e.g., as it is used in the book of Psalms. For example, in Psalms 22 (which begins “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”) we find (vs. 19, 20): “Oh LORD, don’t stay away from me! Come quickly to my rescue! Save me from the sword; save my life from these dogs.” The salvation needed when that Psalm was written was from the wrath of enemies; today, our enemy is global warming.

An Alternative to Atheism

James B. Gray

Recently I had an opportunity to attend a lecture, advertised as one on Church-State relations. The speaker was with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and I assumed that his lecture would focus on the work that his foundation has done—and is doing—in attempting to block governmental efforts to lend financial support to religious organizations. The introduction provided for the speaker—whose name is Dan Barker—seemed to confirm my expectations. I did, however, learn from the introductory remarks that Mr. Barker was raised in Fundamentalism, upon reaching adulthood became a Fundamentalist preacher/evangelist, but then later “converted” to atheism—and is now a PR man for the Freedom From Religion Foundation. In addition, I learned that Mr. Barker is a composer and talented jazz pianist; in fact, after the talk Mr. Barker played several of his compositions.

Unfortunately, Mr. Barker’s talk did not meet my expectations. Although Mr. Barker is an articulate, engaging, and entertaining man, his focus was not on his foundation’s work in defending the Constitution. Rather, the emphasis was on his organization’s proselytizing of the atheism/agnosticism philosophy. Which fact I found somewhat ironic given that whereas his organization criticizes (rightly) proselytizing on the part of “faith-based” organizations receiving governmental funds, his own organization is also heavily involved in proselytizing, not just defending the Constitution. Granted that his organization, in not being a recipient of governmental money, has the legal right (I assume) to proselytize. But by doing so it not only “apes” the faith-based organizations that it criticizes, but alienates those of us who believe that Constitutional rights should be protected, yet do not share an orientation to the sort of free thinking (i.e., debunking, primarily) promoted by his organization.

Still, I must admit that a few days later, upon reflecting on the lecture, I concluded that it was fortuitous that his lecture had the sort of orientation it did, for it encouraged me to think about atheism/agnosticism (which hereafter I will refer to simply as “atheism”). In the process of so doing it dawned on me, first, that Christianity and atheism, rather than being on *opposite* sides of the coin, are actually on the *same* side of the coin! What do I mean in making this curious claim?

The coin that *I* am thinking of has *orthodoxy* (correct beliefs) on one side, and *orthopraxy* (correct behavior) on the other side. Given this, from *my* perspective Christianity and atheism are on the *same* side of the coin (the orthodoxy side)—for in both cases the orientation is to correct *belief*. Central to Christianity, as it has existed since Constantine’s time at least, is the *affirmation* of certain “truths;” and central to atheism, on the other hand, is the *denial* of those same “truths.” Thus, atheism is basically reactive in nature, deriving its life from Christianity—ironically. Put another way, Christianity and atheism are bedfellows (!) because for both *belief* plays a central role.

Atheists see as the problem with Christianity that its belief-structure is faulty. I agree heartily with that judgment, but that is not my principal problem with Christianity. I see Jesus’s “ministry” as having been motivated by his observation that the Law being promulgated in his time was an inverted (and therefore *perverted*) version of the True Law: rather than teaching

“*help* the victim,” it taught (if but indirectly) “*blame* the victim.” Given this distortion of the Law, I see the aim of Jesus’s ministry being to restore the True Law. However, the particular Jesus movement that evolved into Christianity, rather than continuing the *orthopraxy* orientation of Jesus, turned its back on it in favor of *orthodoxy*. Meaning that just as the Judaism of Jesus’s day turned the Law on its head, so did Christianity in effect invert the ministry of Jesus.

Given this perspective on Jesus and Christianity, the point, as I see it, is not to confine one’s attention to problems with Christianity’s belief-structure but, rather, to recognize that what Jesus’s ministry—the Bible in general, in fact—was about was *orthopraxy*: neither the canonical nor non-canonical “gospels” provide one with evidence that Jesus’s orientation was to *orthodoxy*. Not only to recognize this fact, but *embrace* it. Indeed, as I argue in my “Worship” on this site (<http://religioustolerance.org/Worship.pdf>), one can think of there being a Tradition that not only runs through the Bible, but began before Bible times, and has continued after Bible times down to the present. A Tradition that is there not only to research and study, but *join*—i.e., enter, become a part of, become an active participant in.

Atheism, with its negative orientation—its obsession with debunking beliefs associated with Christianity—provides one with no alternative to Christianity—the “theory” here being, I assume, that no alternative is needed, it being enough simply to know “the truth.” If people think that that’s all they need, I say let them continue in that belief. As for myself, however, I find the Tradition an interesting part of history, and believe that if one accepts the basic thrust of the Tradition (i.e., a concern with well-being, especially on the part of humans), and has some knowledge of the Tradition, one will want to become a part of it. And if one then “makes the plunge” into the Tradition, not only will one likely contribute to a better world, but add to one’s own well-being in the process.

I therefore invite people who have problems with Christianity to recognize that there are at least two options open to them. One option is to renounce Christianity and become an atheist (or agnostic). But another option is to turn to NeWFism (described in my “Worship,” referred to above). The NeWFian may disagree with many of the tenets of Christianity, but his/her interest is not so much in disputing those tenets as in furthering the Tradition.

Those who have read “Worship” will know that my discussion of the Tradition therein is brief, to say the least! Personally, I do not feel “called” to produce a lengthy treatise on the Tradition, but I wish that one or more individuals *would* attempt such—because I am convinced that such scholarly work has real merit: it can help make the Tradition attractive, and help motivate those who choose to become a part of the Tradition. The only advice I would offer people willing to undertake such an effort is that they recognize that we live in the present, and therefore should *live* in the present—and that they then write their histories of the Tradition from that perspective (while also striving to be truthful, of course).

Past members of the Tradition whom we remember were very much engaged in the (then-) contemporary affairs of their society, and we today should follow their lead—each of us attempting to contribute in his or her own way. Historians of the future may not mention us in their works, but that’s not should motivate us anyway. Rather, we should be motivated by a desire to contribute to others (including posterity); recognizing that in the process of so doing, we will likely find that we simultaneously contribute to our *own* well-being as well. Thus,

becoming a part of the Tradition can be a “win-win” situation. Can atheism make this claim? (A rhetorical question, by the way!)

On Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

James B. Gray

An important distinction in the religious realm is that between *orthodoxy* (i.e., correct belief) and *orthopraxy* (i.e., correct behavior)—which hereafter I will refer to as D and P for the sake of convenience. These concepts are often presented as opposites—analogueous to the two sides of a coin. However, not only are there differences between D and P, but similarities as well. My goal here, in fact, is to identify similarities as well as differences with respect to D and P (from my perspective—admittedly—as a P person).

A similarity that can be pointed out at the outset is both D and P are *normative* concepts, in that both involve value judgments. “Correct” belief, on the one hand, refers to belief in that which is alleged to be *true*. And “correct” behavior,” on the other hand, is behavior alleged to be *good*. So that of the classic triumvirate of truth, goodness, and beauty, two are involved with the concepts of D and P (although some associate beauty with both truth and goodness). In addition, it is pertinent to note at this point that belief and behavior (if not *correct* belief and behavior) overlap in the sense that beliefs are associated with *everyone* (whether in the D camp or P one), and the same is true regarding behavior.

One might argue, I suppose, that belief and behavior occupy separate realms, for behaviors are *events* that occur in the physical/material realm, and beliefs exist in the intellectual/mental realm—with the latter being, only with difficulty, thought of as “events.” However, one can make *statements* about behavior only after one has identified *types* of things, and *named* them. So that in a sense, behaviors don’t even exist until types of behaviors have been identified and named! We can observe behavior occurring in the real world (by humans, by animals—even by, e.g., clouds), which fact “tells” us that what we are observing is real. But all we have is “blooming confusion” until we start using our minds to identify types of behavior and simultaneously provide a name to each type. Which behavior (yes, this intellectual activity *can* be thought of as involving behavior) may then be followed by the development of hierarchical classifications (of either logical division or grouping varieties).

The intellectual activity that I refer to above should not be thought of as involving description but, rather, *pre-description*—and specifically *construct* creation. The reason: one has not yet made any *statements* regarding behaviors. Which is not to say, however, that all statements are of a descriptive nature (e.g., there are also normative statements). Descriptive statements are, though, the fundamental ones; and the basic principle that should guide one creating such statements is that they should be “truth-telling” ones. That is, they should be objective—meaning that they should have intersubjective reliability (i.e., regarded as “true” by those qualified to make that judgment).

Descriptive statements purport to report truths about the real world, an assumption underlying them being that the “things” being described are real things, not fictitious ones. Which points up the fact that just because one creates names for things, it does not follow that those names have real-world referents. For example, the name “unicorn” exists, but it does not follow that unicorns exist—in the real world, at least.

Some names are created for things that are clearly invented, rather than discovered: the world of fiction is filled with examples, as is the world of movies. In other cases, however, names have been created for things that some *claim* to have real-world referents, while others *dispute* that claim—the primary case of interest here being that of “God.” In such cases it may be impossible to resolve the dispute because the parties involved cannot agree on what constitutes adequate proof as to the existence or non-existence of the thing in question. The fundamental difficulty involved with such cases is that because the thing in question cannot be observed directly, its existence can only be *inferred*. But inferred from *what*? Given that the parties involved are unlikely to agree on an answer to *that* question, their dispute will likely remain unresolved over time—and may, in fact, become rancorous, given that each party has a psychological investment in its position.

Any given statement that makes reference to “God”—i.e., God has certain characteristics (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence), God has done certain things, God is currently doing certain things, etc.—is likely to be accepted as “true” by some people, but denied by others. Those who do *not* accept the statement will fall into two categories. On the one hand are those who disagree with the statement on the basis that because (they say) “God” is the name for a non-existent entity, the statement is meaningless. On the other hand are those who believe that “God” is the name for a real entity “out there,” but disagree with the given statement because they do not accept the concept of God embedded in the statement, disagree with the characteristics attributed to God in the statement—or both. Regardless of the basis for disagreement, the two (or more) parties involved will likely never resolve it because of an inability to establish objective evidence for the existence of God.

But I am getting off the track here, and must return to my main theme—similarities and differences between D and P. I have already offered some brief comments on similarities between the two, and therefore will devote the remaining paragraphs below to differences—concluding the presentation with criticisms that D people make of P ones, and the converse. In discussing differences I do so under the headings Beliefs, Proper Beliefs, Behavior, and Proper Behavior.

Beliefs

The beliefs of people can be separated into the categories “secular” and “religious,” and the first observation that can be made regarding D people in our society is that they accept most of the beliefs “out there” that can be given the label “secular.” There are, however, exceptions such as denying that the earth is old, denying that evolution (especially of the polytypic variety) has occurred, asserting that homosexuality is a matter of choice, and asserting that males are superior to females. So far as religious beliefs are concerned, D people typically believe that:

- There is a Being “out there” (i.e., God) who is human-like in having the capability of making decisions, but otherwise is far superior to humans; for God is all-powerful (i.e., omnipotent), all-knowing (i.e., omniscient), etc.
- God is the Creator of the cosmos, including all of the lifeforms in it.

- What the Bible reports about God—as to what God said and did—is factual information about God.
- Therefore, the facts reported in the Bible should be believed.
- Also, the behavioral injunctions (i.e., behaviors enjoined and forbidden) attributed to God in the Bible should be perceived as intended not only for people living during “Bible times,” but for all people at all times. Given that all of the behavioral injunctions attributed to God in the Bible are accurate reports, they must not be obeyed selectively: *all*, rather, must be obeyed.

P people tend to accept virtually all of the “secular” beliefs current in our society, which fact distinguishes them somewhat from D people. However, given their orientation to behavior—proper behavior in particular—they especially have an interest in beliefs that pertain to behavior. They have an interest in:

- Explanations that have been offered of human behavior (dealing with such factors as the role of human biology, present context, upbringing, the “discrepancy” factor,¹¹⁰ etc.).
- The identification of excuses that people use to engage in behavior that they, as P people, regard as improper.
- The identification of obstacles that people (whether D or P) face in behaving in a manner P people would “lift up” as desirable.
- The identification of behaviors that could possibly be engaged in by P people either to help remove obstacles that prevent people from engaging in behaviors that P people regard as desirable, or help others see that the “reasons” they give for engaging in undesirable behaviors are (from a P perspective) actually just *excuses* (and as such, not well-grounded).

Proper Beliefs

The orientation of D people is to “proper” beliefs, and their concept of what constitutes proper beliefs is very much Bible-related. Thus, they tend to “hold up” such “proper” beliefs as:

- The Bible is “God’s Word.”
- God created the cosmos.

¹¹⁰ This refers to the fact that although humans have basically the same biology now as they had prior to the Agricultural Revolution several thousand years ago, they now have ways of life that are “out of sync” with the way of life (gatherer-hunter—or “cynegetic,” to use Paul Shepard’s term) for which they were “designed” by evolution. Given this discrepancy, humans are now forced to engage in numerous “unnatural” behaviors and are confronted with numerous unnatural stimuli—and both of these factors have implications for their behavior (the fact of being forced to engage in unnatural behaviors being a cause of additional unnatural behavior—including so-called compensatory (which is a misleading term in that it fails truly to compensate for what is missing)).

- God is omniscient, omnipotent, etc.
- Jesus was born of a virgin.
- Jesus is God's son, sent to earth to die a sacrificial death, to atone for our sins.
- Jesus was resurrected, then ascended to Heaven.
- Jesus will return some day, and at some point after that event those who "believe in" (or believed in) him will be raptured off to Heaven.

The P person has a simpler concept of what constitutes "proper" belief: proper belief is belief in that which has been established as being objectively true. Which means that P people reject many of the religious beliefs of D people, on the basis that the latter's beliefs cannot be established as demonstrably true. Indeed, they are likely to point out that a belief that refers to the *future by its very nature* cannot be established as true: *projections* are of a different order than *facts* (as anyone who watches the weather news on TV knows!). But although the P person rejects many of the beliefs associated with "Ddom," s/he has the wisdom to recognize that the life of any person on the one hand involves projections (whose "truth" cannot be established *a priori*), and also beliefs whose veracity cannot be established definitively. Thus, the P person will harbor beliefs as to what exists and what is true, along with projections as to what might occur, with the full knowledge that these do not meet the rigorous standards of scientific objectivity—which facts will not bother the P person because s/he knows that this is simply how it must be, and one must then simply try to be as reasonable as possible in what one believes.

Behavior

Behavior as a subject to research and learn about is something that D people tend to lack an interest in—for the simple reason that they tend to believe that human behavior has no deterministic element but, rather, is a matter of choice. Given this, what's the point in attempting to find non-existent "laws" which explain human behavior? P people do not deny that humans have "free choice," but also recognize that regularities can be observed in human behavior—which fact suggests that human behavior is subject to scientific (i.e., empirical and theoretical) study. P people would add, however, that given their orientation to what they regard as "proper" behavior, they are especially interested in discovering and learning facts relative to behavior that relate rather directly to their particular orientation.

Proper Behavior

D people derive—or say they do!—their notions of what sorts of behaviors are "proper" from the Bible. However, their notions of what is "proper" tend to relate more to behaviors that should *not* be engaged in rather than behaviors that *ought* to be. Therefore, insofar as "sin" is a part of their vocabulary—which it is!—their orientation is more to sins of commission than omission. Furthermore, they often assert that sinful behaviors are a result of Original Sin (which they connect to a "sinful nature" that we are alleged to have been born with¹¹¹)—thereby not

¹¹¹ Meaning that some strange inheritance process is at work that enables us to inherit, biologically, a

perceiving that they are changing the “ground rules,” given that this view is in conflict with their assertion of free will. Paradoxically, D people seem to believe that sinful behavior is inevitable, despite the “fact” that people have free will. And that because sinful behavior is inevitable, police are necessary (especially for the purpose of apprehending offenders, rather than preventing sins from occurring in the first place), a court system with lawyers and judges are needed for trying the accused, and jails/prisons are needed for incarceration of those found guilty—the purpose of incarceration being not only to prevent those found guilty from harming others, but to punish them (“an eye for an eye”). How this view of the purpose of incarceration relates to their (confusing) views as to the basis of human wrong-doing is not clear.

An important category of *improper* behavior for D people is *verbal* behavior—whether oral or written—that denies the truth of beliefs that D people hold dear, or is regarded by them as blasphemous. D people denounce such offenders as heretics or blasphemers, and tend to believe that they are justified in attacking such people—not only verbally, but physically. Indeed, the killing of such people is often regarded as within the realm of permissibility by D people—whether or not such killing is against the civil laws of their society. Thus, there are some in our midst who, because the Bible declares killing is a sin, and that the killing of a fetus involves, well, killing, they have God’s permission to bomb abortion clinics—despite the fact that that might involve killing its occupants! It’s not clear what theory guides such behavior, but an “eye for eye” one must somehow be involved.

The orientation of P people is to behavior that they regard as desirable, and because “desirable” may be interpreted variously, herein I will confine my comments to my personal views on the matter. As I state in “Worship” (on this site), “desirable” behavior is behavior that contributes (directly or indirectly) to the well-being of one’s fellows and/or the survival of species—including our own! They therefore engage in direct actions to help others, attempt to influence the voting of legislators, work with members of their church (or organizations such as Habitat for Humanity), etc. They may relate their planning and actions to the Tradition I refer to in “Worship,” some other “theory,” or simply to, e.g., the Golden Rule.

P people recognize that some people, for a variety of reasons (or because of a number of different factors), engage in behaviors that detract from the well-being (or even lives) of others, and therefore agree with D people that there must be police officers to not only apprehend offenders, but deter offenses from occurring in the first place; a court system; and jails/prisons for incarcerating those convicted. However, P people tend to perceive offenses as the result of a faulty societal situation rather than individual defect, so that on the one hand they support measures designed to prevent offenses from occurring; and favor programs for those incarcerated that are oriented to treatment/restoration rather than punishment.

P people recognize that when it comes to religious matters the views that *they* hold are not shared by all others. In fact, some P people suspect that the specific views of any given person are unique to that person—so that it would be wise for one to recognize that one’s own views are “merely” subjective. So that one should not only try to avoid “pushing” one’s own views on others, but should strive to be tolerant toward others; that, indeed, one should *welcome* learning about the religious views of others, for this might help one make one’s own views more mature.

trait derived from actions supposedly engaged in long ago by Adam and Eve!

Thus, the attitude that P people tend to have regarding the religious views of others often differ sharply from those held by D people—which fact has consequences rather different from those associated with the attitudes of D people.

Criticisms: Of D People Regarding P People

For D people it is obvious that the (Christian) Bible is “God’s Word,” and therefore not to be taken lightly—one’s soul being in danger if one so does (i.e., one runs the risk of spending eternity in a very warm place). D people look at the Bible as having authoritative character, and therefore believe it essential that what they say and do is authorized by the Bible. Given their belief-system, they take offense at the treatment of the Bible that they perceive on the part of P people—people who lack sufficient reverence for the Bible, even to the point of not giving it much attention at all. They may therefore accuse P people of living by man-made rules, rather than God’s laws—which fact they may find deeply disturbing. What may especially bother them regarding P people is that they perceive them as having an ambiguous, amorphous concept of God—if, in fact, they even *believe* in God. Thus, D people find it easy to think of P people as either agnostics or (Heaven forbid!) atheists; and because they believe D people are headed for Hell, believe it their obligation to warn P people of the danger they’re in, and try to convert them. If P people resist these attempts, D people—because they may perceive P people as a sort of pollution (!)¹¹²—may feel it as their duty to rid the world of this form of pollution.

Criticisms of P People Regarding D People

P people tend to be much more tolerant than D people, but this does not prevent them from being critical (although not vociferously, usually) of D people. They may argue that:

- D people are very selective in their use of the Bible—using only passages that support their preconceived opinions.
- D people use the Bible to authorize views and/or behaviors that they prefer, rather than viewing the Bible as a book whose basic thrust can be determined—so that one can then allow the Bible to “author” one’s life (to use terms borrowed from theologian Delwin Brown).
- D people fail to recognize that a variety of concepts of God are present in the Bible, which fact can be interpreted as giving one permission to arrive at a concept of God that one finds reasonable.
- D people fail to recognize that the basic thrust of the Bible is a valuing of universal (human) well-being, and that the Bible can be perceived as a partial record of a well-being Tradition—a Tradition that began before Bible times, and has continued after Bible times down to the present. So that, given this perspective on the Bible, the point is for one to become a part of that Tradition.

¹¹² What’s ironic about this, of course, is that when it comes to *real* pollution (e.g., “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere), D people seem to have little concern—not wishing to recognize the very real threat that those gases pose, not only to other species, but their own.

- P people may even come to conclude that the reason people are attracted to the D “philosophy” is that they want to live by the society’s dominant secular values (i.e., greed, materialism, and selfishness), yet do not want to admit this, either to others or themselves. The D philosophy is, then, attractive to them because it enables them to live by the society’s secular values while pretending to live by Biblical values. Therefore, D people are either people who have fooled themselves (and others) as to the basic thrust of the Bible, or are hypocrites who know full well what the Bible is “about,” but want to make others believe that they are “Bible-believing” folk.

It is my considered opinion—as one who has done extensive reading in and about the Bible, and who is a Senior Citizen who has been “churched” virtually all his life—that the Bible strongly supports the *orthopraxy* position. Yet, it seems that most Christians in the United States are either in the D group, or a group with the D philosophy and P one sharing honors. If NeWFism (see my “Worship” on this site) were to develop and expand, the situation might change. Let us hope that this happens!

Jesuanism, Then and Now

James B. Gray

There are a number of questions for which I would like answers of some sort (e.g., even speculative ones, if well-argued) regarding the first three or four centuries of Jesuanism¹¹³ (the “groups” that I refer to below are all ones assumed to have originated through “knowledge”—or at least beliefs regarding—Jesus):

- What groups formed, and under what circumstances (i.e., how and why did a given group come into existence)?
- What specific individual(s) was involved in founding a given group?
- What name did members of a given group give to the group?
- Was there also a name(s) given to the group by non-members of the group (whether or not Jesuan)?
- When did a given group come into existence?
- What was its longevity?
- Where did it originate?
- How many members did it have?
- What were the characteristics (occupational, educational, demographic, ethnic, etc.) of those members?
- What style of leadership was in operation with the group?
- Did the given group have ties with other Jesuan groups? That is, was it part of a quasi-denomination?
- What was the nature of relationship of the group to other Jesuan groups? To Mystery groups? To Jewish synagogue groups? To civil authorities? To the general public?
- What was the basic thrust of the group (i.e., what purpose did it establish for itself)?
- What practices/rituals were associated with the group?

¹¹³ “Jesuanism” is preferable to “Christianity” in that it is a more generic term.

- What beliefs were associated with the group?
- What literature was produced by the group?
- What literature produced by others (whether other Jesusans, Jewish, or pagan) was regarded as important by the group?
- What changes occurred in the group over time in terms of the above, and why did those changes occur?

When I purchased Burton L. Mack's *The Christian Myth* (2003) recently, I had hoped that in it he would expand the discussion he had presented in *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (1995). In that book he had stated (p. 44): "For the first forty years we are able to identify at least seven different streams within the Jesus movement, though there may have been many more." He then (pp. 44 – 45) lists those groups:

- Community of Q.
- A Jesus School (that produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories).
- The True Disciples (who produced the Gospel of Thomas).
- The Congregation of Israel (which composed the pre-Markan miracle stories).
- The Jerusalem Pillars.
- The "family" of Jesus.
- The Congregations of the Christ.

What I had hoped to find, then, in Mack's more recent book was an elaboration of the discussion of Jesusan strands (or "streams," to use his term) given in the 1995 book. However, he does not do this in the 2003 book. In fact, although Mack is gifted at inventing elaborate explanations, the arguments that he presents in the 2003 book are, for the most part, not very convincing—because insufficiently grounded in empirical data. A further point is that although I see the orthodoxy-orthopraxy dichotomy as having fundamental importance for understanding early Jesusanism, this distinction does not seem to be important for Mack.

I would like to see someone create a history (necessarily a rather speculative one) of the early centuries of Jesusanism, such that Part I would present the "history," this "history" providing answers (so far as possible) to all of the questions I listed above. Some of the answers would have solid empirical support, others would be reasonably good inferences, and still others would be mere guesses. But an attempt would be made to provide as complete (and honest—fancy that!) a "history" as possible. Then, Part II would provide the evidence—empirical data and inferential reasoning process—that underlies the "history."

In effect, the “history” would be a Grand Hypothesis, and presented as such. The idea would be to present a “theory,” but also present the basis for that theory—so that others then could use the work as a starting point for their research, so that the “history” would become developed, refined over time.

Why would I like to see this? I see NeWFism (see my “Worship” on this site) as extending a Tradition that goes far back in time, an important feature of NeWFism being that it continues the “ministry” of Jesus in a fashion such that if Jesus were with us today, he would embrace NeWFism. Given that so many USans (i.e., U. S. Citizens) and Canadians have a background in Christianity, they are more likely to turn to NeWFism if they can see that NeWFism carries forward Jesus’s “program” more authentically than does any contemporary branch of Christianity. And NeWFism might have an appeal to many Europeans because it eschews an orientation to belief in favor of one to behavior, lives comfortably with Science, yet claims the Biblical heritage as its own. Ironically, just as Christianity wrested the Hebrew Bible from Judaism, and made it a part of their Bible (but denigrating it as the “Old” Testament), so does NeWFism claim the Bible for itself—at least insofar as the Bible can be thought of as containing a record of the Tradition (referred to in my “Worship”).

As to the questions regarding early Jesuanism that I pose at the beginning of this essay, a question that arises is: Why have they not been addressed adequately? And of course a part of the answer is that there is a paucity of good evidence—some of that evidence having been destroyed by “Christian” leaders! A second reason, however, is that given the mountains of paper that scholars of early Jesuanism have produced over the past two centuries, undertaking such a project would be an almost superhuman task—and there doesn’t appear to be any scholars “out there” with the intellectual capability to undertake such a task.

A third factor, however, is a general lack of *courage* on the part of scholars in this area—who would rather address esoteric topics, and then write for obscure journals that no one reads. If one were to write a history of early Jesuanism that attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, as well as honest, it would offend virtually all leaders of Christian groups—would, in fact, so deeply offend them that they likely would viciously attack the scholar in question, with the intent of destroying his/her career. Not exactly Christian behavior on their part (!)—but, then, that depends on how one defines “Christian,” does it not. For being vicious—to the extent of killing—is far more a part of Christian history than being kind, loving.

The leadership within Roman Catholicism would be expected to attack such a work because it would destroy their claims of apostolic succession. And because the Protestant Reformation did little more than change the governance system of Christianity, and retained its orientation to orthodoxy, Protestant groups would no doubt denounce the work because it undermined that orientation.

It’s true that a number of books, over the past few decades, have made reference to the fact that considerable diversity existed within early Jesuanism, but the books/articles that have done so have offered only brief discussions that have offered little challenge (such as Mack’s *Who Wrote the New Testament?*), have been ahistorical in the sense of eschewing an orientation to historical development (such as Bart Ehrman’s *Lost Christianities*), or (most commonly) have lacked comprehensiveness (even to the extent of being esoteric).

Finally (and please forgive me for suggesting a somewhat “far out” possibility here), there is the explanation that the questions have not been properly addressed to date because the System cannot tolerate the truth on this matter. Let me explain myself here.

A number of years ago Eugene Linden wrote a book (*Affluence and Discontent*, 1979) that argued (in effect, if not actually) that Gaia recognized that it had made a mistake in allowing humans to appear on the scene, and determined to rid earth of that cancer—a species that had become a cancer after the Agricultural Revolution of several millennia ago. Therefore, it allowed humans to make all sorts of innovations/discoveries, such that humans thought they were making “progress,” when in actuality they were digging a grave for themselves—a grave that would be complete when, via “global warming,” they would cause negative feedback mechanisms to give way to positive feedback ones. The result of which would be initiation of a process which would result in sudden change—change that would become so rapid that humans would not be able to adjust to it; besides being change whose end result would be an earth so different that it would be unable to support human life.

And who is to say that we are not at the beginning of that stage right now? For the models of climatologists have been *underpredicting* the changes that have been occurring. And our carbon dioxide recording station in Hawaii has determined that for the past few years, the rate of carbon dioxide increase in the atmosphere has *itself* been increasing—which is precisely what one would expect if “runaway” is in its early stages.

It may very well be too late to “nick this problem in the bud”—for whereas “global warming” makes the headlines one day, Paris Hilton does the next: our news media have become pathetic in their lack of responsibility, and our political leaders have become worse than pathetic in this regard. However, I remain hopeful, for I believe that if NeWFism were to become initiated, and then “take off,” there is a strong possibility that “salvation” could come to humankind.¹¹⁴

Were a comprehensive—and honest—history written of early Jesuanism, it would become clear that the particular Jesus movement that evolved into Christianity achieved prominence, not because of its superior authenticity relative to other Jesus movement strands, but because it was *useful* to the State (then led by Constantine).¹¹⁵ That is, in Constantine’s time it was the State that was the System’s dominant sector. Ever since Constantine’s time Christianity has served the interests of the System, even though the dominant sector has changed over time. So that the Protestant “Reformation” occurred at a time when the Economy was emerging to dominance, which sector has been dominant ever since (although the subsector having dominance has changed over time).

The proliferation of denominations within Christianity (and Protestantism in particular) reflects the fact that honest disagreements have arisen relative to belief and practice, but more basically reflects the fact that we live in a society wherein economic matters are on center stage.

¹¹⁴ Incidentally, a NeWFian movement would also (I believe) address the “monism” problem that Mack identifies and discusses in his *Christian Myth* book. See Chapter 7 (“Christ and the Creation of a Monocratic Culture,” pp. 153 – 75), and also Chapter 8 (“The Christian Myth and the Christian Nation,” pp. 177 – 93) and “Epilog” (pp. 197 – 99).

¹¹⁵ However, it was the emperor Theodosius who (in 380 CE) made Christianity the *official* religion of the Roman Empire.

Economic and scientific/technological development together have resulted in a proliferation of occupations, and *that* development has been accompanied by the development of a rather fine-grained social class system. *That* development, in turn, has provided the basis for a proliferation of denominations within Christianity: different social classes have different needs, and different religious denominations have appeared on the scene to serve those needs. In other words, the System has had need of there being the development of a great variety of Christian denominations, and has somehow then caused this to occur.

If, indeed, there is merit in this view that there is a sinister Force (the System) at work in our world—and I see merit in it, recognizing full well that it is a “crazy” thesis—it means that if NeWFism gets underway, it will have a real battle on its hands. But perhaps that’s precisely what we should *think*. That is, perhaps we will only be successful if we convince ourselves that we are faced with an extremely powerful enemy—such that unless we do all in our power to combat this foe, our species will be consigned to the dustbin of history.

In conclusion, let me state that although I would like answers to the questions that I posed at the beginning, I also recognize that it is essential that we prioritize: Despite the fact that it might be helpful to the Tradition (NeWFism in particular) that those questions be answered (because the answers would be helpful to those who would like to enter the Tradition), it is far more important that we recognize the perilous situation that we humans are in, and act to prevent (or try to) ecocatastrophe. Insofar as NeWFism can contribute to that end, it would be well that NeWFism receive an impetus. At the same time, however, it should be recognized that the answer to our perilous situation likely lies not *just* with NeWFism: other avenues also offer promise, and should not be ignored.

The Tradition and Well-Being

James B. Gray

The Tradition (see my “Worship” on this site) is about *well-being*, defined in the broadest possible terms. During “Bible times,” the focus was on *human* well-being (the well-being of fellow Hebrews in particular), and the general assumption underlying the Biblical literature was that ill-being resulted from being widowed or orphaned, or poor for other reasons (e.g., “bad luck,” or exploitation). However, the (Christian) Bible gives little attention to the “why?” of ill-being, its focus, rather, being on the assumption that “haves,” because they *can* help those with ill-being, *should*—whether or not they are *responsible* for the ill-being of those with ill-being.¹¹⁶ The Bible then goes on, e.g., to provide instructions (e.g., in the form of laws—and parables, in Jesus’s case) as to what “haves” should do, and (as I detail in “Worship”) makes various attempts to motivate them so to do (e.g., “don’t forget that you, yourselves, were once slaves in Egypt”).

We modern members of the Tradition have a much broader perspective on the matter of what should be included in the Tradition—so that, e.g., we think of it as encompassing not only a concern for human well-being but human survival, the well-being of living things in addition to humans, and the integrity of, e.g., aspects of the natural landscape. Regarding the latter point, modern members of the Tradition regard a natural feature such as Devil’s Tower (in Wyoming) as sacred as have Native Americans for centuries.

As part of their broad perspective on well-being, modern members of the Tradition have, as one of their concerns, an interest in developing an historical perspective on the human species from the standpoint of human well-being. In light of such a concern, I herein offer some tentative views—in the form of a logical argument—on the matter. In developing a logical argument one of the difficulties encountered is discovering a starting point that leads in a direction that is enlightening and useful; I am hopeful that the starting point that I use here is of such a nature: time will tell, as they say.

The starting point that, at present, seems to me to have promise is the observation that for an individual (of any species) to survive (and thereby have an opportunity to reproduce), it must:

- Obtain what is for that particular individual suitable food, and water (plus air, of course).
- Avoid becoming food for an individual(s) of another species (ruling out here the possibility of cannibalism—becoming food for another individual(s) of the same species.)

To obtain food/water for sustenance, an individual must either:

- Engage in activities which result in the acquisition of suitable food and water; or
- Be supplied such by another individual(s), usually of the same species. (Usually this applies to the just-born and other young individuals not yet able to engage in the

¹¹⁶ The same viewpoint is implicit in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*.

necessary activities themselves. It can also, however, apply to the old, the crippled, the ill, etc.).

To avoid becoming food for an individual(s) of another species, the individual must either:

- Engage in activities which result in one avoiding death “at the hands” of predators; or
- Be protected by another individual(s) from predators.

To engage in the behaviors that result in food/water acquisition (for either oneself or another), an individual must have the physical/mental characteristics¹¹⁷ that enable those behaviors. Likewise, to engage in the activities that enable one to avoid one (or others under one’s protection) from becoming food for members of other species, one must have the physical/mental characteristics that enable *those* behaviors.¹¹⁸

This background discussion allows me next to make the fundamental point that I wish to make here: The physical/mental characteristics which I have referred to (in general terms) above can be thought of as possessed by individuals by virtue of (not the decisions of a supernatural entity but) natural *selection mechanisms* operating (with the “laws” of heredity¹¹⁹) over time. Those selection mechanisms have been operating with reference to the species in question, *and* the physical characteristics of the habitat occupied by members of that species (the reference here being to just that part of the species in question occupying the given habitat—this area assumed to be relatively homogeneous in that it does not exhibit much spatial variation in temperature, etc., conditions).

Note that in referring to “selection mechanisms”¹²⁰ I have used a plural, rather than the singular “natural selection.” I have eschewed use of “natural selection” for two reasons. First, the term, as defined by Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species* (1859), has the following meaning:

Given the members of a species living within a certain area, members of the species being variable genetically,¹²¹ and there being excess births, this will result, and only result, in intraspecific competition. Those individuals having physical attributes enabling them to survive this competition will survive (some of them later producing progeny), and be the only survivors; the others will perish. Given that the process involved here is a natural one, the term “natural selection” is an appropriate one for labeling the process.

¹¹⁷ Physical characteristics would include size, anatomical structure, physiological characteristics, etc.

¹¹⁸ Note that there are two sets of behaviors involved here; I will not speculate here as to the degree of overlap that might exist between the two sets. The point that I wish to make is that for an individual to survive, *both* sets of behavior need to be engaged in: it is not enough to have behaviors engaged in relative to food/water acquisition (for oneself and/or others), while the behaviors that would prevent one (and/or others) from being killed by predators are not.

¹¹⁹ Recognizing that these “laws” are not of a deterministic nature.

¹²⁰ I have written a lengthy paper on this matter, but cannot delve into it here because that would take me too far off course.

¹²¹ The word “gene” would not exist for several more decades.

If this process continues over time (and no changes occur in the environment), the species will change over time—as that variable(s) which confers an advantage in intraspecific competition will become ever-more important in the population.

Given that “natural selection” so conceived has virtually no relevance for understanding changes in real-world species—and no relevance whatsoever for understanding temporal changes in the human species—the term “natural selection” simply has no relevance for the subject at hand.

The second reason for my avoiding the term “natural selection” is that not only was Darwin not consistent in his use of the term, but the term is frequently given a meaning that is not in agreement with the meaning given to it by Darwin (including in *Origin* itself!). At the beginning of *Origin* Darwin commented disparagingly on the viewpoint, associated with the naturalists of his day, that what might be called “environmental selection” could explain species change, and then went on to offer his theory of natural selection as an alternate explanation. Yet many overlook these early remarks of Darwin, and assume that by “natural selection” Darwin meant “environmental selection”! Had Darwin been consistent in his use of “natural selection” in *Origin*, this confusion may not have arisen. But because of the two reasons stated above, I avoid the use of “natural selection” in the ensuing discussion.

The selection mechanisms involved in “producing” the physical/mental characteristics referred to above (note that they are only ones that are inherited) will not be discussed here except to say that they can be thought of as of two types:

- Mechanisms whose operation produce differential survival.
- Selective mating (i.e., “sexual selection”).

Note that these are not “either/or” categories, just *different* ones; for both sorts of mechanisms can be thought of as operating simultaneously within a given group. Several mechanisms of the first type will always be operating simultaneously; and while those mechanisms are operating, so will be some sort of sexual selection mechanism—and these mechanisms need not be operating in the same direction. And even if they are operating in the same direction, it is likely that a different variable(s) will be associated with each mechanism. The significance of these facts is that unless one is aware of the specific mechanisms operating with a given species within a given area, one cannot “predict” the consequences (physical, mental, and behavioral) for the species, in terms of changes over time.

The significance of thinking of the physical, mental, and behavioral characteristics of a given species as being the result of naturally-operating selection mechanisms is that it implies (assuming that the environment involved stays basically the same from year to year¹²²) that all members of that species “fit” both the environment inhabited by the species, as well as the

¹²² In other words, one can say that the area has a *climate*. For one can say that an area has a climate only if the pattern of weather conditions for a given year is basically repeated year after year. Until recently, it was possible to say that every part of the earth had a climate, with different areas having different kinds of climate (there being several different classifications of climates). Now with “global warming” occurring, however, weather conditions are becoming more variable, and therefore less predictable—so that the term “climate” is becoming increasingly meaningless.

behavioral patterns associated with the species (referring here both to behaviors related to food acquisition and prevention from becoming food for others, and behaviors of individuals of the species relative to conspecifics). The genetic variability within the group means that different individuals will fit the situation to different degrees. Specifically, we can say that for any *given variable*, individuals will vary in their degree of “fitness” for the situation; and that the individuals most “fit” in terms of *one* variable will not necessarily be the most “fit” in terms of some other relevant variable (one that is relevant for survival in particular).

We have now reached a point in our “analysis” where we can bring in the subject of human *well-being*. For we can now assert that **if individuals “fit” the situation within which they find themselves, this implies that they have well-being.** Their well-being comes from the stimuli provided by their lives (whether while active or passive); and from the behaviors engaged in as a part of their way of life (in that the physical behaviors keep them “physically fit,” and interactions with conspecifics contribute to mental health).

Once one adopts this perspective on well-being, and applies it specifically to humans, one can begin to appreciate the importance of two facts:

- From a biological standpoint, humans have changed little since the Agricultural Revolution of several thousand years ago—in large part because the selection mechanisms that had been operating in the past have been “overcome” by technological developments and the rise of moral codes (that, e.g., prohibit the practice of infanticide).
- Ways of life have changed greatly since the Agricultural Revolution, especially since the Industrial Revolution got underway 250 years ago and even more so since the advent of the Scientific/Technological Revolution a century or so ago.

In the colorful language of David P. Barash, world history during the past few thousand years can be viewed as a race between a tortoise (i.e., human biology) and a hare (i.e., human ways of life).

Changes in way of life have therefore, given the above two facts, meant that people have been:

- Prevented (not entirely, of course, but largely) by their “modern” way of life from engaging in those behaviors for which they had become “designed.”¹²³
- Forced by that way of life to engage in “unnatural” behaviors.¹²⁴
- Prevented from interacting with their fellows in a manner natural to them (e.g., as observed in present-day “primitive” societies¹²⁵).

¹²³ The concept of “design”—but from a cybernetics/decision science perspective, not a sociobiological one—has been developed well by George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.

¹²⁴ René Dubos, has stated (*So Human An Animal*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968, p. 16): “In many respects, modern man is like a wild animal spending its life in a zoo . . . deprived of the natural stimuli essential for many functions of his body and his mind.”

¹²⁵ See, e.g., Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley, *The Challenge of the Primitives*. New York:

- Forced to interact with others in an unnatural way.
- Prevented from being exposed to stimuli for which they are designed.
- Forced to be exposed to stimuli for which they are not designed.
- Unable to ingest substances (food items in particular¹²⁶) for which they are designed.
- Forced to ingest items (again, especially food items) for which they are not designed (e.g., foods with residues of pesticides and/or insecticides).

In short, there has been a growing “discrepancy,”¹²⁷ since the Agricultural Revolution, between the way of life for which we are designed and the ways of life that are imposed on us by our societies.

So what? There is a good basis for arguing that this Discrepancy is at the root of the ill-being problem in today’s world—a problem most severe in “third-world” societies, but also “advanced” ones (psychological, rather than physical, ones being more prominent in the latter). Meaning that the reasons for ill-being today differ rather substantially from what they were in “Bible times.” Not that there isn’t overlap, though. The sorts of specific problems relatable to the Discrepancy are manifold, but can be categorized as:

- Physical ailments (including obesity) resulting from ingesting toxic substances, being exposed to the stresses of everyday living, etc.¹²⁸
- Mental problems resulting from life’s stresses, the lack of support groups, etc.

The upshot of the above discussion is that for members of the Tradition to play a significant role¹²⁹ today, they need to know the basic reason for the existence of ill-being today—the Discrepancy.

What can—and should—we do? Eaton *et al.* have provided a 39-point list of “prescriptions” in the book previously cited.¹³⁰ And Paul Shepard has given us a list with 71 ideas, under the

McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975.

¹²⁶ Food is given emphasis in S. Boyd Eaton, Marjorie Shostak, and Melvin Konner, *The Paleolithic Prescription: A Program of Diet and Exercise and a Design for Living*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988.

¹²⁷ See “The Conflict Between Culture and Biology in Human Affairs” section (pp. 318 – 24) in Chapter 10 (“The Sociobiology of Human Behavior: Extrapolations and Speculations”) in David P. Barash, *Sociobiology and Behavior*. New York: Elsevier, 1977. For example, Barash asserted (p. 318) that the discrepancy referred to “may underlie most of our problems today.”

¹²⁸ See, e.g., Noel T. Boaz, *Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making us Sick*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

¹²⁹ Which role, however, should not be limited to the goal of reducing ill-being in the world—for today we are faced with the unique possibility that our species, before the century is out, will go the way of the dinosaurs.

¹³⁰ See their Table XX, “The Paleolithic Prescription: Research Consensus,” *op. cit.*, pp. 279 – 83.

headings “Ontogenic,” “Social,” and “Other.”¹³¹ It should be obvious, however, that the basic answer is *societal system change*: the alternative—changing human biology—would be not only difficult, but unwise to attempt. For what would we gain in losing our humanity?!

Ironically, during the nineteenth century many ideas were put forth (often in the form of “utopian” novels), and “experiments” undertaken, aimed at societal system change—with even newspaperman Horace Greeley (via Albert Brisbane) promoting this possibility. Those ideas and experiments failed to “take hold”—for a variety of reasons, but including the possibility that they were premature. *Now* is when those ideas/experiments are relevant, and we are fortunate in that an abundance of literature exists on the subject. Perhaps if, on the one hand, we take heed of that literature and, on the other hand, begin initiating a NeWFian movement, implementable ideas will be generated as to what end we should seek, and how—and humankind will be “saved” after all.

¹³¹ *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998, pp. 171 – 72.

“Left Behinders” and the Tradition

James B. Gray

In my “Jesuanism, Then and Now” on this site I noted that one way of conceiving world history is to think that it has been guided by Gaia—with Gaia’s intent, for several thousand years now, being to destroy the human species. The “theory” here is that with the Agricultural Revolution, Gaia came to realize that it had made a mistake in allowing humankind to evolve, because humankind had begun to become a cancer, and would only become ever more destructive over time. Therefore, Gaia, using the (limited) powers available to it, began guiding world history in such a way that humankind put itself on a course that would eventuate in its annihilation—with humankind all the while being convinced that “progress” was occurring! I went on to argue that although this theory can rightly be regarded as a “crazy” one, it might be *useful* to accept it nonetheless—for such acceptance might motivate us humans sufficiently that we will act—quickly and decisively—to stave off disaster. That is, it might be wise on our part to regard the theory as being *pragmatically* true, even though it might not pass the “truth test” in other philosophical systems.

Although I continue to accept this latter point, it dawned on me several days after writing “Jesuanism, Then and Now” that not everyone “out there” thinks that the potentially catastrophic results of “global warming” should be considered *threatening*. There *are* some in our midst who, rather, *look forward* to those results, because, in their minds, those results portend a *blessed* future—for them, at any rate. Thus, although some of us, in looking into the future, do so with the fear that humankind may be entering its final phase of existence, with our species (along with many others) becoming extinct within a few decades, others have a rather different picture of the future. For those in this second group, the prospect of global ecocatastrophe “announces” the imminent occurrence of The Rapture—a brief period of time during which those who “believe in” (or are now dead, but while alive believed in) Jesus will fly off to Heaven, with earth becoming Hellish (at least for a period of seven years of Tribulation) for those remaining behind. (Please note that I recognize that there are various “theories” regarding The Rapture, and I am referring to just one here.) Those holding this latter theory are, of course, convinced that *they* will be among the select few whose destination will be Heaven; and evidently not at all disturbed that many of their fellows will, according to their theory, end up living in torment and pain—at least during the Tribulation period. (“They had their chance, and they blew it. They have no one to blame but themselves!”)

One perspective current in our society, then, is that numerous species—including our own—may become extinct before the century is out). Another perspective, however, focuses solely (or is it “soully”?) on human life, and holds that “normal” human life on earth *will* end “soon,” and that life will become non-normal for *everyone*: the select few, on the one hand, who “believe in” Jesus, will fly off to an eternity of blessedness in Heaven; while those “Left Behind” are subjected to a tormented/painful life on a Hellish earth, at least for a period of seven years.

Of course, I suspect that the dominant view—by far—in our society coincides with neither of the above views: Things will continue pretty much as they have over the centuries, with the general trend of “progress” continuing, and potential “crises” such as that associated with “global

warming” submitting, in due time, to scientific/technological solutions. So that there is simply little reason to waste one’s time thinking about what might happen in the future.

Those who regard themselves as “Traditionists,” however (i.e., as part of the Tradition referred to in my “Worship” on this site), are in none of the three above-mentioned categories. The Traditionist perspective—as I see it, at least—is that:

- The likelihood of there being a “Rapture” is too small to be given serious consideration. On the one hand, one can question the assertion that this notion has a Biblical basis; on the other hand, one can ask: “Even if the Bible *does* predict that a Rapture will occur some time, why should I accept that prediction?” (A rhetorical question, of course.)
- The continuation of existing trends *will* result in the extinction of numerous species before this century is out. Indeed, even if humans everywhere were to cease releasing “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere *today*, it is still inevitable that about 40% of all species will be extinct before the end of this century.
- It is entirely conceivable that *our* species will be among those that will become extinct. Although humans claim to be at the apex of species so far as intelligence is concerned, their *actions* provide little evidence in support of that claim.
- We humans should do what we can to prevent *any* species (including our own!) from becoming extinct.
- If we are to minimize the number of extinction “events,” we need to begin acting *yesterday*—and do so decisively.
- The latter should involve using whatever science/technology is available that might help our cause, but even more basically should involve efforts at societal system change—given that the “Discrepancy” is at the root of so many of our problems (see my “The Tradition and Well-Being” on this site).

The Traditionist position, then, is one that involves a series of *beliefs* and *projections*, combined with the *valuation* that the continuation of life is a good thing. And I should add that this valuation carries with it disapproval of abortions, except under special circumstances. Which does not mean, however, that one in political office could not be simultaneously a Traditionist and one who believes that laws permitting abortions should be left on the books (because s/he knows that having laws against abortion will not prevent them—and that the better approach is to work at preventing unwanted pregnancies, and working at facilitating adoptions). Such a position is likely to offend those who label themselves as “liberals.” But, then, who said that Traditionists fall neatly into one or other of the three standard philosophical categories?—liberal, moderate, or conservative.

If one accepts the Gaian thesis stated briefly above, one might regard the “Left Behind” phenomenon as confirming one’s thesis—and remain in a state of passivity, “knowing” that one is powerless to fight Gaia. If, however, one is a Traditionist (and NewFian to boot), one will recognize that in working to stave off global ecocatastrophe:

- A variety of different tasks are involved; and
- One is, on the one hand, limited in the sorts of tasks that one is capable of doing but, on the other hand, one *is* capable of performing some tasks of importance; so that one should get on with *identifying* those tasks, and then starting to *engage* in them.

Each person who regards oneself as a Traditionist will need to reach conclusions and make decisions relative to the second point. But I would like here briefly to identify some of the sorts of tasks associated with working to reduce “global warming,” and then offer some comments relative to the “problem” that some of our fellows actually *welcome* the prospect of global ecocatastrophe.

As to the kinds of activities that can be identified as helpful for addressing the problem of “global warming,” they can be placed into two categories:

- Positive actions aimed at reducing “greenhouse gas” emissions, which can include:
 - Efforts to reduce one’s own “contribution” to global warming, by reducing one’s use of the automobile, making one’s dwelling more energy-efficient, reducing one’s consumption of store-bought goods (whose production and transportation involved pollution), etc.
 - Contacting one’s political representatives, and urging them to support legislation that would tend to reduce “greenhouse gas” emissions.
 - Promoting an eco-communitarian movement.
 - Working to develop technology whose implementation would tend to reduce “greenhouse gas” emissions.
 - Etc., etc.
- Actions motivated by the recognition that many of our fellow citizens “out there” are either nonchalant regarding the prospect of global ecocatastrophe, resulting from global warming; or are actually thrilled at the prospect.

Whereas educational efforts, taking a variety of forms, can be directed toward the nonchalant ones in our midst, those of our fellows who, because of their acceptance of the “Left Behind” ideology, welcome the prospect global ecocatastrophe, will need special attention. Such people should not be simply ignored, because millions of such people live in the United States (and elsewhere). It may very well be the case that most such people are not particularly influential members of society. Some of their leaders, however, *do* have influence, and have the ability to “marshall the troops” in support of causes perceived as to the interests of the Left Behind ideology. Therefore, Traditionists not only need to be aware of this fact, but need to develop a strategy for approaching those who adhere to this ideology. Regarding this latter point, I would suggest the following:

- Recognize that it's highly likely that many of the Left Behinders have a strong emotional investment in this ideology: acceptance of the ideology constitutes a significant part of their personality. Given this, they will have a difficult time separating themselves from this ideology.
- As Traditionists, they lack a strong desire to proselitize others: They respect the right of others to reach their own conclusions on religious as well as other matters, and therefore believe it unethical to engage in "conversion" efforts. This does not, however mean (they believe) that they should keep their views to themselves—and, in fact, they believe they have an *obligation* to try to convince Left Behinders to abandon that ideology.
- Knowing, however, that Left Behinders are often strongly attached to that ideology, and that they must approach such people in a loving way, they must be very careful in *specifically how* they approach such people.

Where do these observations lead us? To two principles, I believe:

- Recognize that because Left Behinders ostensibly have derived their ideology from the Bible, short essays be prepared that question this claim.
- Use these essays not for the purpose of speaking to Left Behinders regarding their (misguided) belief system but, rather, as handouts (defined broadly—so as to include not only literal handouts, but the writing of letters to newspapers and periodicals, the posting of essays on internet sites, etc.).

Regarding the first point, we are fortunate to have such resources at hand as Barbara R. Rossing's *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (published by Westview Press in 2004) and David B. Curie's earlier (2003) *Rapture: The End-Time Error That Leaves the Bible Behind*, published by Sophia Institute Press. Traditionists may object to the latter book on the basis that it ends by substituting a Roman Catholic ideology for a Left Behindish one. But both books can serve as resources for those wishing to create brief arguments to the effect that the Bible does *not* support the Left Behind ideology.

As to the principle that one should eschew *talking* to Left Behinders in one's effort to dissuade them from their ideology, keep in mind what I wrote in "Worship" (on this site) regarding the efforts of Traditionists to protect the sense of self-esteem of others that one wishes to help in some way—the fact that love of others includes developing *respect* for others; and that *that*, in turn, requires the development of *empathy* for others. As difficult as it may be to accomplish, one must try to achieve that imaginary transference of identity (i.e., putting oneself in the shoes of another) that enables one to love others in a manner that protects their integrity as human beings.

Trying to convince Left Behinders by talking to them might be perceived, by them, as threatening to their egos—so that it is more advisable to give such people literature presenting the Traditionist position. The "presenting" can be done in a literal sense in the manner of those who hand out Bible tracts, but can also take the form of writing letters to periodicals, etc. If a Left Behind, in coming thereby to understand that the Left Behind ideology lacks a solid

Biblical basis, wants to talk to you as a Traditionist, you should by all means meet with that person, and talk with that person in a non-threatening manner—a manner that demonstrates that you value him/her as a person of equal worth. The outcome, then, may very well be that the Left Behinder will abandon, without any sense of psychological loss, the Left Behind ideology in favor of a viewpoint more compatible with a Traditionist one.

It is easy to “look down” on those in the Left Behind camp as not only lacking in education, but intelligence—and therefore treat them with disdain. Not only is this a mistake; it is a manner of treatment that is contrary to the Traditionist philosophy. Traditionists, in their concern for the future, need all the allies they can get in their “war” *against* “global warming”—and *for* a better world!

Revelation and The Tradition

James B. Gray

Let me make clear at the outset that by “revelation” here I am referring to the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible. That said, my first point is that a “Traditionist”—i.e., one who identifies with the Tradition discussed in my “Worship” on this site—has a perspective on the Bible that differs from that of the Christian. Whereas for the Christian the Bible is in some sense “God’s Word” and therefore authoritative, for the Traditionist the Bible simply provides a record of the Tradition during a certain period of time. Put another way, the Christian Bible is of interest to the Traditionist insofar as it provides information relative to the Tradition—which fact implies that only certain portions of the Bible are of interest to the Traditionist, and that the interests of the Traditionist extend beyond the Bible.

The Traditionist views the books that comprise the Bible as having been written for the contemporaries of those who wrote/edited them, so that the Tradition content of a given book may, on the one hand, be regarded as only of historical interest or, on the other hand, may be regarded as not only having relevance for contemporaries of the writer/editor(s), but for us today. For example, the “love thy neighbor” injunction found in both “Old” and “New” Testaments is viewed by Traditionists as in this latter category.

But do Traditionists see the Book of Revelation as providing any information of interest to them? That is a question that I wish to address in this essay. And the initial question that needs to be asked is: What is the book basically *about*? Let us here follow the lead of Barbara R. Rossing (*The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, 2004), and assume that the Lamb is the central character of Revelation, and accept her thesis that (p. 142): “The Lamb is leading us on an exodus out of the heart of empire, out of the heart of addiction to violence, greed, fear, an unjust lifestyle or whatever holds each of us most captive.”

My reaction to this particular “summary” of Revelation is that whereas the Traditionist does not approve of violence, greed, fear, or anything else that might hold us humans “captive,” I do not see the Lamb (i.e., Jesus) as providing the necessary leadership. Rather, I see the leadership coming from *contemporary* humans—with the possibility that those members of the Tradition who regard themselves as NeWFians (again, see my “Worship” on this site) will look to the Holy Spirit, rather than the Bible, for guidance. And I would add that it is unlikely that Traditionists would see much value in the Book of Revelation for them as modern members of the Tradition.

It does not follow from *that* fact, however, that contemporary Traditionists should simply ignore the Book of Revelation, for this book plays a role—allegedly, at least—in the lives of many North Americans. *Millions* of North Americans, in fact, and in a manner that is antithetical to the interests and values of not only Traditionists, but *everyone*! What I am referring to here, of course, is the fact that Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) and subsequent publications, and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their Left Behind series of books (the first one published in 1996), have been ostensibly deriving predictions from the Book of Revelation (and Daniel, of the “Old Testament”), and also recommending courses of action based on those

predictions. Beyond this, those who have converted to their way of thinking have been supporting certain political candidates, and providing financial support to certain causes.

Whereas the ostensible basis of recent books propounding the Left Behind ideology is the Christian Bible, the actual intellectual lineage of this “philosophy” is traceable back to John Nelson Darby [1800 – 1882], who in the 1840s founded a religious group called the Plymouth Brethren, and developed the concept of “dispensations.” This involved seeing world history in terms of a series of stages, with a “rapturing” of the “saved” to Heaven being an event that was imminent; and those “left behind” suffering a seven-year period of Tribulation, after which period Jesus would return to earth.

This may seem to be a harmless belief system by people who are out of the mainstream, and simply fail to understand that their belief system lacks a firm Biblical basis. But Traditionists—and others—should not take this movement lightly. For members of this movement are not content simply to sit back and wait for the Rapture (and subsequent events) to occur. Many of them *welcome* this possibility; and although it is, for them, a certainty, many of the feel that they should hasten the process along—for example, by using whatever influence they have to bring about the Battle of Armageddon. Unfortunately, because the United States harbors millions of people in this Left Behind camp (mental ward might be a more apt label)—some of whom occupy high positions in our government and our military—this segment of our population poses a threat far more serious than any terrorist group. For if they have their way, and precipitate World War III through their eagerness for Armageddon, we humans may all be doomed. At least then the end will come sooner than it will via “global warming”!

How should Traditionists respond to this menace? One approach, of course, would be to begin by learning about the deficiencies in the thinking of such people. Given that they believe that their views have a Biblical basis, the identification of deficiencies would in large part involve demonstrating the falsity of that belief—and books such as Rossing’s (and books cited therein) will help provide the necessary evidence. In addition, one can try to reason with Left Behinders—but should not expect to be particularly successful using that approach.

The problem is that Fundamentalism itself—which is only about a century old—arose out of a certain societal situation. Scholars often cite two factors in particular as having precipitated the rise of Fundamentalism: (1) The rise of evolutionary thinking, especially after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* in 1859—a body of thinking that challenged the Biblical “truth” that humans and other species had been created by God. (2) The application of critical analysis to what were regarded as the historical claims of the Bible.

I would not dispute this argument, developed by scholars. But I would add to it what I regard as even more “fundamental” (please excuse my language here!). It is not surprising that scholars would identify, as decisive factors, certain *intellectual* developments (such as the two identified above). However, I would emphasize certain features of the society *qua* society as being even more relevant:

- Our society is a hierarchical one—i.e., it is a society with a social class system.

- Our class system is not as rigid as such systems elsewhere; for in our society, if one is born into a certain social class, one is not necessarily locked into that class.
- Indeed, a key part of our society's mythology is that our society offers not equality, but equality of *opportunity*—meaning that one's ultimate position in the social class system is a function of—and only of—one's abilities.
- Furthermore, although it is recognized that abilities are in part *inherited* (i.e., have a genetic basis), they are understood even more so as *acquired*—through hard work, diligence.

What follows from this “theory” is that if one has not, by the time one is ready for retirement, reached a high position in the society, one has only oneself to blame.

What are the implications of this theory for how individuals in our society think and (then) behave? In the first place, it can be noted that the following conclusions logically follow from the above facts and assumptions:

- The worth of a person is a function of that person's achievement(s).
- Achievement is measurable in monetary terms—i.e., the higher one's income, the more one has achieved, and therefore the more one is worth as a person. (Note that when we ask how much a person is “worth,” we are invariably asking for a dollar amount.) “Achievement,” then, is given a special meaning, one that does not necessarily involve striving, working toward a goal: the results theoretically associated with striving (i.e., monetary reward) are used as a proxy for “achievement.” That is, one's achievement is inferred from one's income, despite the fact that such a maneuver is *logically* impermissible.

Second, these conclusions regarding “worth,” in being accepted by people, have implications for our economy—for they drive people into occupations for which they foresee high monetary compensation. Never mind that they choose occupations for which they lack interest, or even talent. The result, for the economy, therefore, is that many positions are filled by people lacking proper qualifications—resulting in work that is done inefficiently, shoddily, or both.

Third, the above conclusions, in being accepted by people, lead them to pursue position within the hierarchy using methods that are questionable (e.g., sabotaging fellow employees); and in attaining a high position, using it to engage in unethical, and even illegal, activities—for personal aggrandizement at the expense of fellow-employees, stockholders, and the general public (insofar as ordinary citizens are forced to help bail out companies destroyed by corporate executives).

Finally, given that because the higher the position in the hierarchy, the fewer the positions that exist at that level, virtually *everyone* in our society is consigned to a life of failure. Those who have *not* “bought into” the system will feel, be affected by, this failure less than others; but even those who explicitly reject the value system of this society have difficulty avoiding their influence—because they, too, are members of the society, and may therefore harbor feelings of failure, if only at an unconscious level.

Given that people differ in their DNA, their upbringing, their current contexts, etc., etc., it is not surprising that different people respond to this sense of failure in different ways. Some become depressed and rather passive, whereas others become excessively busy and/or vociferous. Some become depressed to the point of committing suicide, whereas others express their rage outward in violent behavior, including “road rage.” Some turn to drink, to drugs, to gambling; some become ill (physically and/or mentally); some try to divert their attention away from their situation by becoming obsessed with sports (especially as spectators), pop music, TV-watching, etc. *And*, some get seriously involved with “far out” religious ideas, and organizations that promote such ideas. All of these reactions have in common that they are of a *compensatory* nature (although “substitutionary” might be a more apt term, given that these activities don’t really serve to compensate for what’s missing). Indeed, it may very well be the case that most of the behaviors that occur in our society—and especially during “off” time—are of a compensatory nature—whether or not psychologists are perceptive enough to recognize this possibility.

Left Behinders may not appreciate being put into the same category as drug addicts, and in one sense they are not: they pose less of a threat to humankind as a species than do drug addicts. However, the point is not to gloat over the above placement of those with “off the wall” religious ideas—for one, as a Traditionist, should feel sympathy for *all* of the victims of our societal system. One will be able to feel sympathy for others especially if one is able to *empathize* with them—something that some people are more capable of doing than others, even though one would like to think that becoming older means becoming more mature means becoming more empathetic.

The real question here, however, is: Given that one feels sympathy/empathy for this society’s victims (i.e., virtually everyone—including oneself!), what should one do about it? And the answer is that there is a short-run answer, and a long-run one. The short-run answer is being kind to others, doing what one can for others (without impacting negatively their feeling of self-worth—attempting to do the opposite, in fact), and contributing to causes that can act in one’s stead. The long-run answer, however, is societal system change: given that the *nature of our society* is the basic cause of so many of our problems, the solution is societal system change. (For an excellent discussion of this matter see the old—but still highly relevant—*Rethink: A Paraprimitive Solution*, by Gordon Rattray Taylor, 1973.)

Such change must, of course, be brought about using non-violent actions, and it is tempting to conclude that it should be brought about by *governmental* actions. The fallacy of this viewpoint, however, is that our governmental institutions are a part of the System, and currently subservient to the Economy—which is the dominant sector of the System, and has been for several centuries. If societal system change is to come about, it will need to be a “grassroots” effort; and likely will need to begin with the initiation of an eco-communitarian movement. Fortunately, for such a movement, our history during the nineteenth century included numerous communitarian “experiments” (such as the Shaker communities, Oneida, Harmony, Economy, Zoar); and an extensive body of literature has been created that describes and analyzes that “experimentation”—some of this written during the nineteenth century, and available for downloading on the Google book site. In addition, numerous “utopian” novels were written during the nineteenth century, whose ideas—many of them, at any rate—are still worthy of consideration. (Some of these also being downloadable from the Google book site.)

Our society is not oriented to prevention—which fact helps explain the *raison d'être* of many occupations (or, at least, the numbers in those occupations): police, lawyers, judges, security officers, physicians, nurses, hospital employees, insurance company employees, etc. Perhaps the reason for this is that we have not understood what the roots of our problems have been, and are. But regardless of the reason(s), the fact of the matter is that, as a consequence, we are faced with numerous problems, not the least of which is the threat to our very existence posed by “global warming.” A problem that Left Behinders are not only not helping to solve but exacerbating by their actions. Perhaps some in that group are amenable to rational argument. But Traditionists would do well to concentrate on efforts to reduce the “global warming” threat rather than attempt to “convert” Left Behinders. There is no guarantee that humankind will be “saved” from extinction, given that it is virtual certainty that many species will no longer be with us at the turn of the century. But Traditionists must at least make an effort to stave off this eventuality, hopefully to be joined by many others as well—throughout the world.

A Post-Season Meditation

James B. Gray

Those who ask of others (e.g., political candidates), “Do you believe in God?,” rarely are asking what they seem to be. What they are *really* asking, usually, is: “Is *your* brand of Christianity as much of a sham as *mine* is”? For Christianity, as one finds it in the United States, every bit mocks Jesus as much as the Roman soldiers are said to have done prior to performing their crucifixion duties.

Despite their protestations to the contrary, the values of most Americans bear little relationship to the values attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels. For whereas *our* primary values are greed, materialism, and selfishness (as the recent holiday season makes clear), Jesus’s values, rather, stemmed from two laws: Love God, and love the neighbor. Not only did the Jesus of the canonical gospels *preach* those commands, he *practiced* them.

God plays a role in Christianity, of course, but the God of Christianity bears little resemblance to the God of Jesus. The God of Christianity is a Being “out there” somewhere who functions to act on our behalf (particularly if we “believe in” him and Jesus, and petition him for his favor)—an idea embedded in our “In God We Trust” motto. The God of Christianity is said (albeit more so by some Christians than other ones) to be a loving God; it’s no wonder, then, that we have made a “cosmic bellhop” of God—i.e., treated God as our (mere) servant. True, the requests we make of God are not *orders*; but the idea that lies behind them is the God’s function is to *serve* us humans (“believers” in particular).

The dominant concept of God associated with the Jesus of the canonical gospels is that God is our *King*, with a right thereby to rule our lives. Given this, our role as God’s subjects is to *love* God (as Jesus stated). How does one do this? By following—as best one can—his commands. What is God’s *central* command? Love the neighbor. And given that God realizes that a given person will not find it as self-evident, in a given situation, to know *how* to put that command into practice, God invites us to ask him (via prayer, e.g.,) for guidance regarding how to act—and react—appropriately in specific situations.

This “God as King” concept of God does not sit well with most American Christians, especially those in the upper classes. That is, those Americans who make the basic decisions that affect our lives—including the propaganda that they have created and spread by the “right wing” foundations that they control. Yet it would not serve our leaders’ purposes to denounce God, and so they have “converted” (!) the “God is King” God of Jesus into a very different sort of God—one more compatible with their interests and needs. Hoping, of course, that no one will notice their sleight of hand—because of their continuation of the use of “God language.”

Our leaders are fully justified in their hope that nobody would notice their killing of the “God as King” concept of God, for that concept *is* virtually dead in our society: the fact, for example, that virtually nobody notices that the “In God We Trust” motto embodies the idea that God is our *servant*—not our *master*—serves as proof of my assertion here. As does the question—“Do you believe in God?”—that is so popular in our society—a question that is diabolical in that belief in God as one’s *servant* (which is *implied* in the question) has a meaning which is the virtual opposite of belief in God as one’s *master*.

What further proof can be offered for the assertion that the “God is King” concept of God is not thriving in this society? One answer comes from the recently-observed holiday of Christmas. Let us ask the (rhetorical) questions: Would a follower of Jesus spend large sums of money decorating his home/yard or, rather, would he use that money to help those in need (see Matthew 25 for the answer—if you don’t already know)? Does not the former use of one’s money amount to adding more nails into Jesus’s (already-dead) body? (Is it *really* necessary to continue the crucifixion of Jesus? Indeed, is it *seemly* for Christians to be involved in this exercise?)

Second, if the “God is King” concept were truly alive and well in this society, the society would be very different (again, as the “plan of salvation” in Matthew 25 makes evident): no one would go without food, shelter, or (ill-) health care; everyone would be employed, and in meaningful work; everyone would be treated with kindness and respect (regardless of race, sexual orientation, beliefs, income, education, etc.); our raping of the environment would be a thing of the past; crime would have no causes for occurring; our policies toward other countries would lose their imperialistic tinge; etc. Our elite *could* choose to adopt the “God is King” concept of God, but they have not done so; and the reason is not that doing so would be contrary to “human nature,” but that they have *chosen* their path.

By choice, then, our society’s elite is guided by greed, materialism, and selfishness—and has spread those values to the rest of the society. Not that it has been able to infect *all* members of the society with its values. But the “holdouts” lack the power and resources effectively to combat these evil people—just as Jesus eventually was overcome by the ruling authorities of his society—and, later, by Christianity itself! True, it is said that Jesus was resurrected. The truth of the matter, however, is that Jesus was resurrected by *Christainity*, and in the process made into a different person entirely. A person with which *orthodoxy*, rather than *orthopraxy*, was associated.

Perhaps this is as it must be. Perhaps those are right who argue that Gaia “decided” long ago that it had erred in allowing humans to appear on the scene, and began then to bring about various developments—including Christianity—that would eventuate in humans destroying themselves (along with numerous innocent species, unfortunately)—all the while being convinced that they were “progressing.” Let us hope that these people are wrong—and that NeWFism soon begins to flourish. So that not only can the values of Jesus and the prophets flourish, but humankind be “saved” from an ecocatastrophe that may destroy our species (along with numerous others).

Bad News—and Good

James B. Gray

The “global warming” that is occurring at present is not “good news”—except to those who take the term too literally, and therefore lack an understanding of the various implications embedded in the term. Especially is it not “good news” now that the rate of increase, in the atmosphere, of carbon dioxide (i.e., a major “greenhouse” gas) is *itself* increasing. Which suggests that we may now be in the first stages of “runaway” (or “flipping,” etc.)—meaning that *negative* feedback mechanisms that had, until recently, been operating to maintain relative stability may have given way to *positive* such mechanisms. If *that* has, in fact, occurred, the suggestion is that (1) change will accelerate; (2) it may not be possible to reverse the runaway; and that, therefore, (3) humans—along with numerous other species—will become extinct before the century is out.

Despite the possibility that it may be too late to prevent our going the way of the dinosaurs (but for very different reasons), it would be foolish of us to resign ourselves to the possibility of oblivion. Of course, those in our midst who expect to be “raptured” off to Heaven in the near future—and therefore are longing for the Battle of Armageddon—may see impending doom—regardless of cause—as welcome; and because of that attitude may even be attempting to *hasten* that Battle. (Certainly such people have helped exacerbate the situation in the Middle East.) Most of us, however, not only reject the claim that there will be a Battle of Armageddon, but also the value judgment that such a battle should be looked *forward* to. Most of us, therefore, would like to see actions taken having the intent of preventing catastrophe from occurring (i.e., ecocatastrophe, as well as armed conflict). I, for one, align myself with such people—adding only that I think it unwise to look just (or even primarily) to government (at any level) for the necessary leadership.

Although our current situation gives us good reason for pessimism, it contains optimistic elements as well—and I wish to touch on both facets of the present in the paragraphs to follow. In doing so, I find it useful to begin with the observation that our society is a *system*.

Such a characterization carries with it a number of implications, the first that I will mention being that it consists of a number of *sectors*. These interact one with another—and are, in fact, *dependent* one upon another. But this “working together” is not one of equals benefiting equally—as is suggested by most of the “social science” literature to which the student is exposed, even at the university level. Rather, one sector—the Economy—occupies a dominant position within the System, with the other sectors serving the needs of that dominant sector. (By the same token, *within* each sector a hierarchy of social classes exists.)

Thus, the education subsystem’s products are individuals who will be useful (if only by being unemployed!) to the Economy, enabling it to continue functioning fairly smoothly. The political sector is controlled by the Economy, and therefore does the Economy’s bidding. The communications sector, having become an integral part of the Economy, serves the Economy by diverting people’s attention from the Economy’s workings—currently, e.g., devoting considerable attention to political campaigns, for the benefit of the many in our society who are naïve enough to believe that their vote actually has significance. (Naïve not because lacking in

intelligence, but because successfully propagandized by the major media—newspapers, magazines, television.)

Dominance by the Economy means that economic activities are given prominence—i.e., production of goods (and “services”), transportation of goods and people, and consumption. Given that our major sources of energy are derived from petroleum, our usage of energy involves pollution. And because economic activities have been put on center stage, the *amount* of pollution that the average American “contributes” to the atmosphere is highly significant indeed, compared to most other countries.

Theoretically (as they say), our society could switch to non-polluting energy sources fairly easily and rapidly. (Indeed, one cannot deny that efforts are currently underway to “technologize” ourselves out of our dangerous situation.) However, given that the political sector is the Economy’s servant, it is foolish to look to that sector for leadership out of our current “wilderness.” And given that the education sector is also subservient to the Economy, people learn to value the activities associated with the Economy, and learn to value material things (especially new ones—and ones involving electronics)—to the extent that they think of “standard of living” in strictly material terms. Also, in acquiring the habit of an abstract way of thinking from the disciplines of Economics and Business Administration, they find it difficult to appreciate Nature (in its *particularities*, that is)—and the damage they are doing to it. Of course, the fact that most of us live *apart* from Nature (we can’t even see the night sky because of the “light pollution”!) also contributes to our lack of concern for Nature.

Some may believe that the existing System carries within it the seeds of its own downfall. And although there may be some truth in that statement, the danger in giving it too much credence is that it can lull one into a state of passivity. The existing System *does*, however, have a feature that can be “tapped into” by those who reject the idea that the System can be *reformed* in favor of the thesis that it needs to be *replaced*. The “feature” to which I am referring here is that it provides us with an unnatural way of life:

- We are denied stimuli that we need for good physical/mental health.
- We are forcibly exposed to stimuli that contribute to ill-health.
- We are denied foods to ingest that would contribute to good health.
- We find it difficult to avoid foods whose contribution to good health is suspect.
- We are forced to engage in behaviors that are unnatural.
- We can, only with great difficulty, engage in those activities for which we were “designed.”

The basic fact underlying these various individual facts is that since the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago—and especially since the Industrial Revolution of 250 years ago—ways of life, for humans, have changed whereas we still have the same basic biology that we had 10,000 years ago. In other words, a “discrepancy” developed millennia ago, and has become more and more significant ever since—the rate of increase in this discrepancy itself increasing over time.

Different individuals respond to this discrepancy in different ways: some become rather passive, some turn to diversions, some become ill (physically and/or mentally), some escape into drugs, some become violent, some accomplish suicide, etc. Those who sense that something is wrong with our society, but have not become incapacitated by it represent, however, a potential vanguard in bringing about significant societal system change. I am referring here specifically to those who feel trapped in a cage, feel exploited, feel insecure, sense that they are being prevented from developing as fully-human beings, etc. People, also, who have some measure of intelligence, and degree of education—especially through reading non-standard books, articles, internet blogs, etc.

People of the sort that I am referring to not only sense—often very strongly—that drastic change is needed, but have ideas regarding what might be done. Usually, what they lack is resources to act on whatever ideas they have. Which is why it is important for them to try to publicize their ideas as best they can—for in doing so they may “connect up” with someone who is not only attracted to their ideas, but able and willing to provide resources that would enable them to proceed with their plans.

In my case, I have offered, on this site, ideas for an institution—the New Word Fellowship—that is a “plan” of a different sort. For the fundamental assumption behind it is that if “services” of the sort proposed are initiated, (1) they can attract the disaffected within our society; (2) the interaction of those individuals can lead to good ideas; and (3) those ideas may then be acted upon. That I perceived the institution as a *religious* one may “turn off” some; but the nature of the institution—i.e., the fact that it recognizes no “heresy”—is such that even the “irreligious” would be welcomed. The main point, however, is that I am among those who are convinced that a movement for change will be truly successful *only* if it is of a religious nature.

Excavating Matthew 25

James B. Gray

The injunctions listed in Matthew 25:35 – 45—feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, receive the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and visit those in prison—were not intended to form the basis for a religion. After all, they were presumably directed at fellow Jews—who already had a religion.

And although stated as a “plan of salvation”—the only such plan put (in the canonical gospels) in Jesus’s mouth, in fact—the injunctions are better viewed as having had a *motivational* intent. With the threat for “non-compliance” contained in the passage indicating not so much Jesus’s belief that there would be a literal Day of Judgment, as his conviction that these injunctions had supreme importance—in that they conveyed the essence of the Law.

It seems rather clear that the injunctions—and warning that “the Kingdom of God is at hand”—were directed in particular at members of the Jewish elite—the purpose of the injunctions being to cause members of the elite to change their behavior relative to those who were non-elite. It goes without saying, however, that this attempt on Jesus’s part failed. If anything, in fact, it contributed to his death! For it likely was one of the factors that led the Jewish elite—its religious component in particular—to plot against Jesus, enlisting the help of the Romans in an effort to divert attention from their role in the plot.

Does it follow from the fact that Jesus did not intend for these injunctions to form the basis for a new religion that they *cannot* be so used? Does it, one might add, follow from the fact that *Christianity* was not founded on the basis of these injunctions (!) that a religion cannot be founded on them? This is not to say that no branch of Christianity gives these injunctions centrality (for, e.g., they do seem to occupy an important place in the thinking of Mennonites); for Christianity as a whole, however, the orientation is more to *orthodoxy* than to *orthopraxy*—with the “Christian Dominionists” in our midst seeming to be primarily characterized by irrationality, intolerance, and even hatred.

Members of the elite would not be expected to develop a religion based on these injunctions, for their role in a society is to exploit those who are non-elite—i.e., to be predators and parasites. Given this role, if they have any religion at all (not a wise decision, given the importance of “appearances”), it must be one that either convinces them that they who are superior folk who have a right to exploit others; or convinces them that they make an essential positive contribution to society, thereby hiding from them their actual role as exploiters. In either case, they need a religion that enables them to exploit others in good conscience—and makes no reference whatsoever to the injunctions listed in Matthew 25.

If, then, a religion is to be created that gives primacy to the injunctions in Matthew 25, it will need to be initiated by non-elite folk. In addition, however, it should be initiated by individuals who recognize that (assuming that the injunctions were actually delivered by Jesus rather than ones put into Jesus’s mouth by the author of Matthew) these injunctions were delivered not only to people living long ago, but to people living in a different place. Which fact implies that the injunctions must be “translated” such that they will have meaning to USans (i.e., citizens of the

United States) living in 2008. By “translate” I mean here (1) given not only a meaning that is concrete in character but (2) one that “speaks” to particular real-world individuals.

The first aspect of this “translation” should—some would argue—begin by determining what the injunctions would have meant 2000 years ago in Palestine. Which determination would, of course, require scholarly research by an army of specialists. The question that arises concerning this, however, is: Would such research result in findings that would be absolutely necessary for a proper interpretation of the injunctions *today* or, rather, would it amount to unnecessary delay—and “make-work” for scholars? Although I may be accused of providing an anti-intellectual answer to this question, my position here is that such research would be a waste of resources: the money necessary to fund such research (enabling those undertaking it thereby to live an upper-middle class way of life) might be better spent helping those in need. Certainly using the money involved to help those in need would be more in conformance to the spirit of the injunctions than would using it to support researchers. Anyone with a modest amount of intelligence and education can determine the “gist” of these injunctions for his or her own life today, without the need of advice from scholarly specialists.

Given this assertion, the question still arises: Who should be given the responsibility for giving more concrete meaning to these injunctions—assuming that such a process would involve generalizing the injunctions as well as then giving them more specific meaning? The standard answer that has, in a sense, been given to this question is: organize people into congregations, then organize the congregations into an umbrella organization; have certain individuals associated with the latter do the basic interpretative work; then, have clergy at the local congregational level do the most basic interpretative work—but based on the higher-level interpretative work done previously by their “superiors.” But is this the best way to proceed?

Some have taken exception to this approach, concluding, rather, that congregations should form, but should remain independent one of another; and that, furthermore, each congregation should choose its own pastor. But is this procedure any better than the first one?

The problem with the first approach is that its use likely will result in a clergy that is not only appointed “from above,” but a clergy that is highly trained. The former likely will lead to clergy selected for congregations who lack knowledge of those in the congregation—perhaps even lacking an interest in “getting to know” well those in the congregation. And the latter likely will result in clergy whose training is primarily in theology and organizing/delivering a sermon, rather than training in sociology, psychology, and other disciplines that might help them understand the nature of the society they live in. Indeed, one could argue that even if one is trained in such disciplines, this is no guarantee that one will have a good understanding of how one’s society “works”—that one will acquire such knowledge only through varied life experience, and the reading of iconoclastic writers. And that only in having such knowledge—along with a personal knowledge of their congregants—will they be able to offer meaningful specific suggestions to congregants.

The second approach has its own problems. The fact that each congregation is independent of other congregations suggests either that congregations formed first and then chose individuals to perform the role of pastor; or certain individuals chose the role of pastor for themselves, and then proceeded to recruit a congregation to “serve.” The former may lead to the selection of a pastor

chosen for his likeability rather than interpretative ability. The latter may lead to the formation of congregations by individuals pretending to having the objective of interpreting the Matthew 25 injunctions, and claiming an ability so to do, but actually having the motive of creating a job for themselves—in some cases being so driven by the Larger Society’s value of “success” that they become exploiters of their congregants (including those out there in radio and/or TV land).

Because of the problems associated with these two conventional approaches, NeWFism (refer to “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning”) suggests exchewing the role of pastor entirely. This does not make NeWFism unique (for, e.g., most Quaker congregations “lack” a pastor); it does, however, make NeWFism differ significantly from most Christian denominations. As does the fact that NeWFism lacks a Scripture—despite the fact that it regards the Christian Bible as an essential document in the Tradition of which it claims membership. Indeed, the injunctions listed in Matthew 25:35 – 45 likely play a more prominent role in NeWFism than in any Christian denomination! There is no need here for me to describe NeWFism’s positive features, as I have done that in *Worship*.” Suffice it to say that the NeWF not only makes maximum use of the talents and knowledge of its participants, but (like a Quaker service) also looks to the Holy Spirit for guidance.

The fact that the Matthew 25 passage plays a central role in a NeWF does not mean, however, that participants give a literal meaning to the passage. For in the first place they recognize that the injunctions all have a short-run perspective (i.e., doing for those in need in the here-and-now), reflecting the fact that Jesus was forced to use such a perspective, given his societal situation (i.e., the fact of Roman dominance of the society within which he lived). We USans today, though, need not limit ourselves to a short-run perspective: despite the fact that we are subject to the same elite domination as were Palestinian Jews in Jesus’s time, we have more opportunity to resist that domination than did the Palestinian Jews of Jesus’s time. As our society moves increasingly in a fascist direction, we may lose that opportunity soon—especially if another 911ish disaster is planned and executed by the powers that be in the near future. (Certainly 911 did not contribute to the democratization of our society!) At present, however, we have enough liberty to act in accord with a long-run perspective—especially if we are wise enough to act in a manner that does not arouse the attention of the elite.

The reason for my noting here that we should be aware of the possibility of acting within the context of a long-run perspective is that a surface reading of the Matthew 25 passage can very well lead us to believe that poverty, e.g., is to be taken simply as a “given.” That is, the passage can suggest to us—if but subtly—that there will *always* be those who are hungry, so that although we have a responsibility to feed the hungry in the here-and-now, we have no long-run responsibility. We have, that is, no responsibility to work at creating a society within which poverty *does not exist*. The NeWFian has the intelligence to recognize that although attention should be given to the short-run, it simply makes sense also to have an orientation to *prevention*. Jesus may have found himself in a situation where he did not have the luxury of having such an orientation, but we moderns are less imprisoned by our situation today here in the United States (and Canada, of course!).

The NeWFian, in applying his or her intelligence to the Matthew 25 passage will seek to generalize it—i.e., “get behind” the *particular* references in it—and in so doing, will perceive that in each case the person to be given attention is lacking in well-being. We are being

instructed to do something for others in the passage because these others are lacking in well-being. Which means that the underlying value judgment here is that well-being is a good: *all* should have well-being—or at least as much well-being as it is possible for them to have. And once we have reached this point in our thinking, we will find it easy to conclude that the long-run deserves as much thought as the short-run.

In fact, attention to the long run is of importance—interestingly—for *short-run* action because exclusive attention to the short-run can lead one to misconceive *why* problems exist—and thereby lessen one’s desire to address them even in the short run. The problem with a fixation on the short run is that it tempts one to be satisfied with *psychologistic* answers—i.e., answers that locate the cause of problems *within* those having the problems. For example, the poverty of someone may be attributed to that person’s “laziness” (a label that suggests that *choices* of the person are the cause of his or her problems). And if one begins to think in “blame the victim” terms, it will be difficult for one to muster much enthusiasm for helping them. In fact, it may become difficult for one to do more than offer grudging help.

If one, rather, examines the phenomenon of poverty using a long-run perspective, and is familiar with, e.g., anthropological literature, one may come to understand that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago, well-being was widespread, and that the ill-being problem with humans only began with the Agricultural Revolution. Put another way, humankind’s “Fall” was (contrary to the Bible, and the position of theologians) a “fall” into agriculture. And the “discrepancy” between *lived* way of life and a *natural* one, precipitated by the Agricultural Revolution, has been increasing over time (at an accelerating rate, in fact)—this discrepancy being the ultimate cause of the ill-being that exists in the world today.

Note that if one adopts this perspective on why poverty—ill-being in general, for that matter—exists, one’s willingness to help others in the short run will be affected; for in not thinking in “blame the victim” terms, one will be more ready to help others in need. Thus, even though one may be unable to make a significant long-run contribution to the solution of societal problems, the value in (also) thinking in long-run terms is that one’s ability to work effectively and enthusiastically on problems in the here-and-now will likely be enhanced.

Although the ultimate cause societal problems is The Discrepancy, the direct cause is the presence of an elite—given an elite’s role of exploiting members of the non-elite (contrary to apologetics by academics, such as the Davis-Moore thesis)—recognizing all the while, however, that members of the elite are also victims of The Discrepancy. But despite the victimhood of the elite, non-elite people who identify with the Tradition (see my “Worship”) would be well-advised to educate themselves on the role that the elite plays in “running” society. It is difficult to become so educated, given the dominant “free-market” ideology, and the efforts of the many right-wing “think tanks” to *miseducate* us. Literature *is* out there, however, (by individuals such as G. William Domhoff, Michael Parenti, L. Harmon Ziegler and Thomas R. Dye), and I advise the reader to seek out that literature.

It is not my goal here to comment on the machinations of the elite, but I would like to close with one comment: The reason it is of value for NeWFians and other members of the Tradition to educate themselves about elites is that this can help them in deciding what projects to undertake,

what projects not to. For to be effective in one's actions, it is essential that one be as cognizant as possible of the "force field" within which one is working.

Why I am Not a Christian

James B. Gray

G. K. Chesterton [1874 – 1936] is famous for having stated in his 1910 *What's Wrong with the World* (Chapter V of Part One): “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.” And (Chapter VI of Part One): “Men have not got tired of Christianity; they have never found enough Christianity to get tired of.”

I will forgive Chesterton for using “men” rather than “people,” given that political correctness was not in vogue in 1910. However, his criticism of Christianity proceeded from an incorrect assumption—that Christianity developed from Jesus’s *ministry*, as recorded in the canonical gospels. What apparently threw Chesterton “off the track” in his thinking here was his assumption that just because Christianity adopted certain gospels as part of its canon, that it therefore based its religion on those gospels primarily.

Although it would be foolish to deny that Christianity has *no* dependence on the four gospels included in its “New Testament,” it is clear that Christianity (1) has more dependence on certain portions of those gospels than other portions (i.e., those that do *not* refer to Jesus’s ministry), (2) draws much more from Paul’s letters than, e.g., the book of James, and (3) was strongly influenced in its development (theology in particular) by the pagan Mysteries of the time. Indeed, one could argue that had it not done the latter, it would not have been very attractive to “Gentiles” and therefore would not have survived beyond, say, the third century CE. (Although we should not forget that Christianity’s success perhaps owes even more to Constantine’s efforts, and the fact that Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 CE. It appears that by 250 CE only about 2% of those in the Roman Empire were members of Jesus groups, with only some of them being Christians—so that if people in the Empire had not been forced to adopt the religion, numbers would have remained small.)

A fact which may have eluded Chesterton is that contrary to what Christians are typically taught, a number of “Jesus groups” developed after Jesus’s death, not just one. It’s not that Christianity has denied this fact; but what it has always contended is that Christianity was the “true” such group, with all other ones being “false”—“heretical,” in fact. That is, Christianity has eschewed objectivity—honesty!—on this matter in favor of a (distorted) version of the truth that supports its own claim to a *genetic* relationship to To what? Interestingly, the claim is not so much to a genetic relationship to *Jesus’s ministry* but, rather, to *apostolic leadership*. That is, Christianity has argued that Jesus assigned rein’s of *authority* to Peter, and that this thread of leadership authority has been passed down through the centuries to today (currently residing in the Roman Catholic pope).

The problem with this line of reasoning is not only that, as the book of Acts and letter of Paul (books in *their* canon!) make clear, after Jesus’s death his brother James became leader of the Jesus group in Jerusalem; in addition, it is known from other sources that leadership of that group continued in Jesus’s family for several decades. The second problem with this line of reasoning is that it asserts that Jesus appointed someone (Peter) to assume leadership after his death, and instructed that person to follow suit before *he* died.—assertions that simply lack empirical support, whether in the New Testament or elsewhere.

Our knowledge about early Jesus groups is limited—and, ironically, has been obtained primarily from the works of early heresiologists!—the works of the “heretics” themselves having, for the most part, been destroyed by Christians. And, unfortunately, discussions of these groups and their leaders have tended to “play it safe” by taking a thematic approach (e.g., Bart Ehrman’s recent book), rather than an historical one. Still, it is clear that a diversity of Jesus groups existed in the early years after Jesus’s death—none of them thinking of themselves as heretical! Indeed, were a competent history written of the Jesus groups in the first century CE (certainly none exists yet!), it might even point out that Christianity does not even have a genetic relationship with Jesus’s ministry—or even the work of one of Jesus’s disciples! (Of course, it’s even conceivable that it might argue that the story of 12 disciples is a fiction lacking in hard empirical support.)

We can, though, state unequivocally that of the various Jesus groups that developed after Jesus’s death, the only one that became “successful” was Christianity. I suppose that one could argue that this represents “survival of the fittest”—the phrase introduced by Herbert Spencer, and adopted by Charles Darwin in the fifth edition of his *Origin of Species*. But such a conclusion would not be complimentary to Christianity—quite the contrary, in fact! For the Jesus group that became (morphed into, Burton Mack has argued) Christianity developed into a religion *about* Jesus, fooling many—including Chesterton, evidently—that it was the religion *of* Jesus.

Because “religion *of* Jesus” and “religion *about* Jesus” both contain the words “Jesus” and “religion,” we are easily led to believe that the one has virtually the same meaning as the other. But how untrue!! Whereas a religion *of* Jesus, by definition, strives to *continue* the religion of Jesus (e.g., by asking “If Christ Came to Chicago,” and then using the answer as its basis), a religion *about* Jesus makes a mockery of Jesus’s religion by basically *ignoring* it. But doing so in a subtle way, so as to give the *impression* that it is actually the religion of Jesus.

Put another way, a religion that strives to be a religion *of* Jesus will be one whose orientation is to *orthopraxy*, and one which perceives Jesus in the context of his Judaism and its scriptures. A religion that is *about* Jesus, however, will have an orientation to *orthodoxy*. And given the context within which Christianity developed (i.e., a society within which many were associated with pagan Mysteries), it is not in the least surprising that much of Christian theology bears a strong resemblance to the myths of those older religions.

As to the question of why Christianity succeeded (and other Jesus groups died), the *most* important reason might very well be that such a religion could be *useful* to the State (the reason the State promoted the religion). And that as the nature of the elite has changed over time, Christianity could easily adapt to the then-current elite’s needs—so that now it functions to serve the interests of a *capitalist* elite. Certainly those current Christian leaders who preach a “prosperity” gospel are functioning in this way: on the one hand, they pose no threat to the current system; on the other, the gospel they preach is the virtual opposite of that taught by Jesus—yet they claim to be “preachers of the gospel”! How audacious! And how blasphemous! Evidently they have not read Matthew 25—so that they are not aware of the fate that Jesus promised to people of their ilk.

No generic term exists for a religion of Jesus, but let me suggest here “Jesuanism.” And the first point I would make about Jesuanism is that one should not think of it as unitary: the canonical gospels do not paint a consistent picture of Jesus’s ministry—and the non-canonical gospels

muddy the waters even further. All that can be said regarding Jesuanism is that it strives to continue the religion of Jesus, as interpreted variously. The NeWFism advocated in my article on this site (“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning”) offers one version of Jesuanism, but does not pretend to be the only version.

I can—and do!—align myself with NeWFism—with Jesuanism in general—not only because I believe it to be Biblical, but believe it to be *right*: my instincts tell me that this is the proper basis for a religion—that it is, in fact, a religion *rooted in human nature*. Christianity, on the other hand, has little claim to be a Biblical religion, being, rather, an ideology that performs a certain societal function. Given its attachment to the social order—and that order’s current drift—it is, in fact, *dangerous* to be a Christian. Not in that it is likely to land one in jail but, rather, that Christians, via their unseemly “contribution” to global warming, may become primarily responsible for humankind’s demise as a species, should that occur

Bertrand Russell had his reasons (expressed in a 1927 [article](#)) for declaring himself a non-Christian. I have my own—and would that others would share that viewpoint. After all, I have children and grandchildren, and would like some assurance that they will have a future! At present, it is rather difficult to be optimistic on that score.

An Answer to a Native American's Question

James B. Gray

Jim Wallis's "Betraying Jesus"¹³² begins with him recounting an incident that occurred while he was attending a conference on social justice in New York City. During the conference, a Native American present "stood up, looked out over the mostly white audience, and said, 'Regardless of what the New Testament says, most Christians are materialists with no experience of the Spirit. Regardless of what the New Testament says, most Christians are individualists with no real experience of community.' He paused for a moment and then continued: 'Let's pretend that you were all Christians. If you were a Christian, you would no longer accumulate. You would share everything you had. You would actually love one another. And you would treat each other as if you were a family.' His eyes were piercing as he asked, 'Why don't you do that? Why don't you live that way?'"

And no one present had an answer!! Which *itself* is a telling commentary on Christianity.

I suppose, in answering this Native American, one could state: "Christianity is a religion that doesn't practice what it preaches, so learn to live with that fact! Although the Bible provides Christianity with its Scripture, you must keep in mind that Christianity pays no heed to the basic "thrust" of the Bible—including Jesus's ministry. Rather, Christianity is a religion oriented to a certain set of *beliefs* regarding Jesus and God—a fact that should be plain from the days that it treats as holy days (i.e., holidays): Christmas is for celebrating Jesus's birth (to a virgin, no less); Good Friday is for celebrating his (temporary) death (as a sacrifice to atone for our sins); and Easter is for celebrating Jesus's resurrection (and subsequent ascension) (its significance being that we, too, will be some day meeting Jesus in Heaven—if, that is, we have "believed in" Him). Oh, then there's also Pentecost, when the gathered ones experienced the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of tongues of fire—but that's just another fact of the past to believe it. Mr. Native American, you have been misled about the nature of Christianity. We may be read passages, on Sunday mornings, from the gospels that give us information about Jesus's ministry, but the main point of sermons is to help us understand what those passages meant in *Jesus's* day, to make us feel good *now* about ourselves, and to provide us with entertainment. We don't attend church with the expectation that we will be helped to apply Jesus's teachings to our everyday lives."

And if this is the answer that one provided to the Native American, I would hope that *his* response would be: "What planet are *you* from, that you can't understand that Jesus's teachings is *precisely* what your religion *should* be based upon?!" But, of course, if the Native American *gave* that answer, it would be perfectly understandable in light of the nature of his cultural heritage. For the values associated with *that* heritage would be very similar to the values associated with Jesus—so that in his reading the gospels, what would naturally "jump out" at him would be Jesus's *teachings*, as recorded in those gospels.

¹³² Available at <http://www.somareview.com/betrayingjesus.cfm>. Derived from Wallis's *The Call to Conversion*, 2005.

If this is much less true for the average *white American* reading the New Testament, what this reflects is that those of us whose ancestors came from Europe (mine came from England) have a heritage rather different from that of Native Americans—which heritage lacks compatibility with the “Biblical witness.”

If the “heart” of Jesus’s ministry is taken to be the Matthew 25 passage that refers (in the form of indirectly-stated injunctions) to feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, and the like, and one makes reference to Matthew 25 during the course of a conversation with a Christian, the response very might be: “What does Matthew 25 say? I’ve never read it, or heard it read—or even referred to—in church.” Or the response might be: “I *know* what Matthew 25 says, but keep in mind that there was such a thing as Original Sin, and the fact that we are all sinful by nature means that we are not *naturally* inclined to give much heed to the commands in that passage.” (To which Paul—were he alive today—might respond: “Read my letters to the Galatians and the Romans, and *that* argument will no longer have validity for you, brother!”)

The answer that *I* would give, however, to the question of why the Matthew 25 passage is not at the center of American Christianity is that various elements of our society’s intellectual “superstructure” play a large role in guiding our thinking and behavior—doing so in a direction different from—and, indeed, *opposed* to—that to which Matthew 25 points. This intellectual superstructure has “evolved” over time (I am writing this on Charles Darwin’s birthday!), and consists of a number of different components. The component that I regard as of especial importance, however, is our *governing societal theory*. This theory, like any theory,¹³³ explains why things are as they are. However, in doing so it, e.g., makes assumptions about how people “naturally” behave that are in conflict with Matthew 25. It is not surprising, then, that the theory “predicts” behavior contrary to Matthew 25—thereby providing people with a reason/rationale for behaving in a manner other than that tacitly commanded in Matthew 25.

What helps make the theory effective in this regard is that few in our society are aware of all of its components¹³⁴—so that few are actually able to articulate it in a clear manner. Therefore, virtually no one has a complete, coherent version of the theory in his or her head. Because, then, the average person only has fragments of the theory in his/her head, the average person lacks knowledge of why s/he is thinking and behaving as s/he does. If the average American does not carry around in his/her head a clear concept of the society’s governing societal theory, one reason for this is that the theory itself consists of two major layers, which layers are only partially integrated one with another—which layers are, in fact, partially contradictory.

Our governing societal theory, then, is somewhat of a mishmash. Most Americans are aware of only parts of the theory, but tend to be influenced by the theory nonetheless—in that it provides guidance to people as to what to think (i.e., what to believe as true)—and, thereby, how to behave. Unfortunately, the kind of guidance that it gives relative to the latter is such as to inhibit

133 Set of statements worthy of the label “theory,” that is; for often “theory” is used where “hypothesis,” rather, would be appropriate. For example, usually when people refer to “the theory of evolution” they are not actually referring to a theory (i.e., an *explanation*) but, rather, are referring to the claim *that* evolution occurs, and has occurred.

134 Given that this serves the interests of the elite, there is a basis for arguing that the reason why the governing societal theory is largely invisible is that the elite engages in efforts to *keep* it this way.

people from acting in accord with the “commands” embedded in Matthew 25—a point that I will be developing in this “essay.”

What, then, is the nature of this theory? More basically: Of what value is it to *know* about the nature of that theory? Let me first address this second question briefly—for if we cannot establish that *knowing* about this theory is of value, there is no point in presenting it. And my answer to this question is simply that the governing societal theory gains its control over the thinking and behavior of Americans precisely because it is “in the air we breathe” rather than being out there in plain view. That is, it controls people precisely because they are only dimly aware of its existence; mainly, it—or fragments of it—exists in people’s unconscious, so that people react to it unawares. Because of this, if the societal theory is made explicit, and people become aware of it, they will have an opportunity to examine it—and in so doing may find it wanting, and therefore abandon it. “Finding it wanting” especially in terms of its inhibitory effects so far as the commands of Matthew 25 are concerned. If you find this argument convincing, read on—for I next discuss the two layers of our governing societal theory, and then comment on the bearing of the theory for Matthew 25. First, though, let us make certain distinctions between behavioral concepts of relevance for the presentation.

Relevant Behavioral Concepts

My intent here is in differentiating between “cooperative,” “competitive,” “aggressive,” “selfish,” and “altruistic”—descriptive terms commonly used (e.g., by sociobiologists) with reference to human behavior, and occasionally with animal behavior; descriptive terms which are discussed here specifically because they play a role in the governing societal theory. Rather than trying to invent sophisticated meanings for these terms, I will take their common meanings, and try to give them a clearer shape than they have in common discourse.

The adjective “*cooperative*,” first, is best thought of as applicable to *groups*, although it is commonly used with reference to individuals as well. As a group concept, “cooperative” presupposes a task which cannot be performed by one individual; it requires, rather, several individuals for its completion. The task might require similar actions on the part of several individuals (e.g., freeing a car stuck in the snow), or different (complementary) actions (e.g., building an automobile). The task may be performed for the (direct) benefit of those doing the task (or one of the group), or may be performed for some other individual/group entirely (e.g., members of a suburban congregation getting together to prepare/serve a meal for homeless people in the downtown area of their metropolis).

Those working together to perform a given task might be (1) behaving instinctively (e.g., members of an ant colony), might be (2) acting out of mutual consent (e.g., Amish building a barn for one of their members), might be (3) employees of a firm working for pay, or might be (4) forced to work together (e.g., slaves building a pyramid in ancient Egypt). Of these four situations only the second is properly labeled as a cooperative situation—i.e., one involving *co*-operative behavior. The individuals in a cooperative situation may vary in *how well* they work with the others in the group—this fact giving rise, potentially, to a scale with “cooperative” at

one end, “uncooperative” at the other, the scale in this case being applied to individual members of the given group.¹³⁵

“*Competitive*” (as used herein) is also a concept used to describe groups. And just as one can think of a given group in dichotomous terms as either cooperative or other (“other” here including the three other categories identified above), one can think of a given group as competitive or not. But whereas a cooperative group is, by definition, performing—as a group—a task, a competitive group (as conceived herein) is a different sort of animal altogether. So that “competitive” and “cooperative,” rather than being bipolar opposites (as is commonly assumed), are like the proverbial apples and oranges.¹³⁶

We would say that a *group* is competitive¹³⁷ if there is a thing (tangible or otherwise) which is in limited supply (e.g., first prize in a contest), which all members of the group would like to acquire (but which all *cannot*, given that it is in limited supply), *and* members of the group are all *attempting* to acquire the thing. In acting to acquire the thing, one directs (if but indirectly) behavior *against* others in the group. Such behavior might take various forms—from physical force (i.e., *aggressive* behavior) to trickery. Even working extra hard (the Protestant ethic!) can be considered to be directed against others, for the end anticipated is the acquisition of more than others in the group (besting the Joneses). The fact that individuals may exert themselves to varying degrees leads to the commonly-encountered expression that some *individuals* are more “competitive” than others (i.e., some exert themselves—“try”—more than others). How “successful” a given individual becomes can then be thought of as a function of how “competitive” s/he is in conjunction with other traits¹³⁸ (genetically-rooted and other) of the individual.

But note here that for the sake of clarity we should not be using the term “competitive” in this case, but should, rather, reserve the term for reference to behavioral characteristics of a *group*. In place of using “competitive” with individuals as observational units, I suggest using, e.g., “aggressive.” Just as “cooperative” has gotten corrupted by applying it to individuals and giving it the meaning “obedient,” so has “competitive” gotten corrupted—in this case by applying it to individuals.

¹³⁵ I recognize that often when the term “cooperative” is applied to individuals, it is a euphemism for “obedient.” when someone tells another to “Cooperate!,” s/he usually means “Do what I say! Obey me!” Note that I am not using “cooperate” in that sense here.

¹³⁶ Apples and oranges are, however, not all that different in DNA terms!

¹³⁷ Note that my reference here is not to those cases where one group is competing against another one (e.g., the New York Giants against the New England Patriots) but, rather, to cases of competition *within* the group: *inter*-group competition vs. *intra*-group competition.

¹³⁸ The term “trait” perhaps carries with it the idea that the characteristic is biological in origin. Given that factors other than internal ones (contextual, etc.) can help explain “success,” perhaps I should use a term other than “trait” here.

Whereas “competitive”—whether at the group or individual level—is all about *acquisition*, “selfish” and “altruistic” are all about *disposition* of that which is acquired. Also, it is only meaningful to think of “selfish” and “altruistic” as applicable to *individuals*—both concepts referring to what one *does* with one's resources.

Although these two concepts are *only* applicable to individuals, it is not necessarily meaningful to apply them to *all* individuals in a given group. For any given group one must first think of a baseline level of possession of a given array of things, this representing the *minimum acceptable* level of possession. Those individuals with a level of possession below the “expected” level are not meaningfully thought of as being either “selfish” or “altruistic.” But for the others one can think of a scale, with “selfish” (100 %) at one end, “altruistic” (0 %) at the other. For a given “other” individual the percent *retained* by oneself can be (hypothetically) determined (relative to that given to others); so that the higher the percent, the more *selfish*, and the lower the percent the more *altruistic*.

It may very well be that those with the most “drive” to acquire are also those who are most selfish. That is, intuitively it would seem that the two variables would be positively—and strongly—correlated. Whether or not they are so related is, of course, an empirical question which, so far as I know, has not been addressed by any researcher, so that I cannot comment on whether (or how well) this hypothesis of a close relationship is supported.

The Base Layer of Our Societal Theory

Let me begin by asserting that the base layer of our societal theory has its origins in Adam Smith [1723-1790],¹³⁹ his classic *Wealth of Nations* [1776]¹⁴⁰ in particular. The updating which has occurred—especially in the form of adding a second layer—involved grafting the Darwinian theory of natural selection onto it—one implication of *that* being that the theory got changed from one emphasizing *stasis* (as if change does not occur over time!) to one emphasizing *dynamism*—“evolution” in particular.

1. The Theory Itself

As to the premises/assumptions that can be thought of as constituting this base theory,¹⁴¹ and specifically its “pure” version, they can be listed as follows:¹⁴²

139. Smith's time has been referred to by Karl Polanyi as *The Great Transformation*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1944.

140. For discussions of Smith see, e.g., Thorstein Veblen, “The Preconceptions of Economic Science: II,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1899; reprinted in Veblen's *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation*. New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919, pp. 114-47 (pp. 114-30 in particular); J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1960, Chapter 19 (“Adam Smith”), pp. 336-56; and Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1993.

141. For some historical background see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

- a. Only matter is “real.”
- b. Regarding people, only *individuals* are real. Human superunits—e.g., families, clans, tribes, nations—are mere intellectual fictions, abstractions, artificial constructs.
- c. A *society* is a mere collection of individuals (i.e., an *atomistic* conception of society is assumed). Insofar as a society is “real,” it is something created by the individuals who comprise it (“social contract”); as such, however, it can have no influence on the individuals in it: “societal influence” is a fiction, an impossibility. However, there is one qualification regarding human superunits: *government* has the capability of “interfering”¹⁴³ in the realm of human activities; can, indeed, *only* interfere. (Which, of course, raises the embarrassing question: Why has government been singled out?! Could it be, perhaps, that the theory was consciously created to serve the interests of the elite?! How dare one think such a naughty thought!)
- d. Individuals are perceived in uni-dimensional (i.e., *reductionistic*) terms—only as actors in the economy (i.e., producers and consumers of goods/services).
- e. Economic activities (in terms of production and exchange) are conducted by household heads (males); “domestic” activities—not recognized as “economic” activities because they involve no remuneration—are engaged in by wives (females) and children. All members of a given household consume, of course.
- f. Household heads are similar in innate abilities. Because each household head acquires certain skills as a specialist, household heads vary in skills. These skills result from *practice*, however, *not* genetic inheritance. (Wives, though, because they all perform the same basic set of domestic tasks—preparing food, doing laundry, cleaning, etc.—differ very little one from another in *any* respect.¹⁴⁴)
- g. Household heads are similar in their *willingness* to work--i.e., there is no variation in degree of industriousness/laziness.
- h. Household heads are similar in *motivation*. Each is “driven” by a desire to maintain survival (this requiring the acquisition and consumption of certain goods) and—beyond mere survival—to attain a certain level of comfort—this level of comfort being the same for all household heads, and being attainable. Given that work is assumed to be irksome (i.e., to involve discomfort), each household head strives to minimize the number of work hours (e.g., weekly) required to attain the given “standard of living” striven for by all.

¹⁴² Note that although this list can be said to have been *inspired* by Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, it was not *derived* directly from that book; rather, it is better viewed as a “fleshed out” version of Smith’s discussion.

¹⁴³ It is highly ironic that those who advocate a laissez-faire philosophy, advocate it for *societies*, but not *corporations*!

¹⁴⁴ For *their* sake, let’s assume that they are all equally beautiful!

- i. Household heads are either self-employed, or sell their labor to another household head (firm); thus, the production units of the economy are not necessarily all one-household units. Given that buyer and seller of labor bargain on equal terms, no employee is exploited; in Marxian terms, no employee produces “surplus value” that is expropriated by the buyer of labor (“capitalist”).
- j. The exchange process is “frictionless” in that no time/cost is involved. It's as if all elements of the economy in question existed at a single point on the earth's surface! (It's amazing how theoreticians in most “social science” disciplines are able to assume away the existence of *geographical space*, yet are able to recognize the fact of *time*!)

2. The Theory's Conclusions

What conclusions logically follow from these assumptions/premises? Once we add the assumption that a force analogous to gravity (but referred to as an “invisible hand” by Adam Smith) is acting on household heads, along with the assumption that there is a “beneficent natural order” (established, and maintained, by God?), we arrive at the following conclusions (beyond the facts that the “market” ensures that the right goods are produced, in the right quantities,¹⁴⁵ with the number of specialists in any given production specialty being exactly what's needed):

- a. Any given household consumes the same array of goods that it would if it were producing just for its own needs (“prosuming,” to use Alvin Toffler's term¹⁴⁶)—but expends less time doing so (a fruit of the “division of labor.”¹⁴⁷
- b. Given that specialists are not only able to produce something more quickly than non-specialists, but with more skill, any given household is able to consume higher-quality goods than would be possible under a regime of prosuming (i.e., self-sufficient households).
- c. Insofar as the economy contains some producing units which involve several household heads, the economy is able to make available some *kinds* of goods whose production would not be possible under a regime of prosuming.
- d. All households spend the same amount of time working, and obtain—and consume—the same array of goods.

145. Economists might not want to admit it, but what seems to have prompted the development of supply-demand analysis was the embarrassing fact that Karl Marx was in the “classic” tradition of using the labor theory of value. Supply-demand analysis permitted economists to disassociate themselves from Marx, and regain a claim to be in the “classic” tradition, while removing Marx from it. See Benjamin Ward, *What's Wrong With Economics?* New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1972, pp. 16 and 58.

146 See Toffler's *The Third Wave*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980, Chapter 20 (“The Rise of the Prosumer”), pp. 251-73.

147 Interestingly, Adam Smith did not believe that machinery would improve the productivity of labor much—emphasizing, rather, the importance of the division of labor.

- e. A *meritocracy* exists in the sense that each household receives (in goods) what it *deserves* (i.e., receives in proportion to effort expended). In this case, however, there is no *variation* between households in income: everyone *merits* the same income, and everyone *receives* the same income. Household heads differ in the *industry* with which they are associated; they do not, however, differ in *social class*. A classless society, thus, exists—the socialist ideal! (Except, perhaps, for the fact that women are basically a faceless blob in this theory: all are domestics—interchangeable ones at that.)
- f. Although a conclusion that is implicit with the theory is that no one is doing for others, it does not follow from that fact that everyone is *selfish*. It is true that the individuals populating our hypothetical society cannot be said to be other-regarding; on the other hand, however, neither can they be said to be selfish—for given that no one *needs* to receive any sort of assistance in this hypothetical world (fairyland?!), no doing for others occurs.

3. Comments on the Initial Version's Assumptions

In commenting upon the theory (as developed to this point), I begin with the premises/assumptions that constitute the theory. And what I will emphasize is the dependence of Smithian thinking upon Newtonian physics—Isaac Newton [1642-1727] having publicized his cosmological ideas just a few decades earlier.¹⁴⁸ I comment on each premise/assumption point by point, then do the same with the five (5) conclusions listed above. Before presenting these comments, however, I should point out that Adam Smith is often described as an advocate of self-interested behavior—and that it is often argued that the “good things” of a free market economy all result mainly from self-interested behavior. It is true that Smith, in his often-quoted “invisible hand” discussion, gave some support to self-interested behavior. But that comment was by no means central to Smith's thinking: the statement doesn't appear until Book IV, chapter ii (!)—and this is the *only* place where the “invisible hand” is referred to in *Wealth of Nations*.¹⁴⁹

- a. The (tacit) assumption that only matter is real is a “reductionistic” assumption, true, but one in accordance with “scientific” thinking as it had developed since Francis Bacon

¹⁴⁸ As Steven Rose has pointed out, Newton's ideas themselves were not that original. He points out that in 1931 Nikolai Bukharin of the Soviet Union delivered a paper in London in which he argued that “far from being a work of pure scientific scholarship isolated from the social conditions of the time, Newton's experiments, theories and the framework in which they were set—their paradigms therefore, in [Thomas S.] Kuhnian language—had been shaped by the new economic demands of England's rising merchant class.” *Lifelines: Biology Beyond Determinism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 51. One might argue, indeed, that what Newton was for the rising *merchant* class, Darwin was later for the rising *industrialist* class.

¹⁴⁹ Jerry Z. Muller, *op. cit.*, p. 86. See also Jonathan Schlefer, “Today's Most Mischievous Misquotation,” *The Atlantic*, Vol. 281 (March 1998), pp. 16, 18, 19.

(1561-1626). Note that the assumption that only matter is real reflects the influence of Newtonian physics.¹⁵⁰

- b. The assumption, regarding people, that only individuals are real, again reflects a decisive Newtonian influence. Note that what we have here is a different sort of reductionism than with the first assumption.
- c. What is assumed regarding society (that it is a fiction, real only insofar as a social contract makes it so) is inaccurate. Historically, it appears that societies originated *before* individuals (in the sense of *self-conscious* individuals), rather than the reverse. So that what the theory assumes here is utterly lacking in realism. In addition, it *is*, in fact, rational to believe that individuals are influenced by the superunits of which they are a part; indeed, the discipline of sociology is built largely on the assumption that individuals create superunits, and that those superunits then create (or at least strongly *influence*) individuals. Finally, it is absurd to assume that government can only "interfere."¹⁵¹ But note that this assumption reflects the influence of Newtonian thinking—and is one that was to the interests of the emerging elite of Smith's time.
- d. The treatment of individuals as just actors in the economy is an expression of the reductionism derived from Newtonian physics: only individuals are real, and the only real thing about them is their economic activities. The fact of the matter, of course, is that individuals are much more interesting—and complex—than this theory makes them out to be!
- e. The assumption that economic activities are carried on by household heads involves a grudging recognition that the household exists as a human superunit. Tacitly, the household is seen as a unit of procreation, child care, and consumption (except that women and children are treated as if they didn't really exist!); but given what is assumed regarding motivation (see point *h* below), it is not clear *why* households would form, and *why* procreation would occur! Although the existence of households is recognized (at least tacitly), households are held to be not "real" in the sense of being capable of affecting their members—which means that the theory denies the possibility of "contextual" variables. Put another way, the theory is "psychologistic" in holding that the behavior of an individual is a function of, and only of, certain *internal* characteristics (in conjunction with a force analogous to gravity). Again, the theory shows the influence of Newtonian physics.

150 E. F. Schumacher (*A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977) has, rather, identified four "Levels of Being" (the title of Chapter 2, pp. 15-25): mineral, plant, animal, and man [i.e., humans]. I might add that the narrowness of Western vision (in recognizing only the material as real) is something that Celtic religious figures—and Celtic-influenced *Christians*—have criticized.

151 Especially given the truism that "remove the state and the regime of capital would not last a day." Robert Heilbroner, *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985, p. 105.

- f. The assumption that household heads are similar in (innate) ability means that individuals are perceived as analogous to chunks of granite; thus, we have here another manifestation of the reductionism of the theory—and Newtonian influence. The *kinds* of abilities that had relevance (for production) when this theory was arising may not have had a strong genetic component; thus, the assumption may have had a degree of realism then. Seemingly, this assumption of equality in ability was a benign one; one can argue, however, that it was advantageous to the emerging elite in that it served to *excuse* them from paying heed to the situations of the poor: it enabled them to ignore the plight of the poor in good conscience. (The elite has an endless bag of tricks, to ensure its continued rule!)
- g. The assumption that household heads are similar in willingness to work: see the comment under point *f* above.
- h. The assumption regarding the motivation of household heads is obviously Newtonian. Note that individuals are not assumed to pursue “happiness,” and it is not clear why they strive to maximize their leisure time—because it is not at all clear what they *do* during “off” time! I would like to think, however, that the theory assumes that although material goods contribute to well-being, their contribution is limited; that once one obtains a certain quantity of goods/services (for sustenance/comfort), one's well-being comes from other sources—such as interacting with others (having similar values), communing with nature, etc.
- i. The assumed equality of buyers and sellers of labor is another manifestation of reductionism and Newtonianism—and is an assumption lacking in realism. Again, we have an assumption that worked to the advantage of the emerging elite.
- j. The assumption that the exchange process is “frictionless” suggests that all households reside at a single point in geographic space! It should perhaps be noted, however, that the world's first explicitly *geographical* theory was not created until the early 1800s—by German Johann Heinrich von Thünen. If Adam Smith's thinking lacked a geographic dimension, Smith can be excused—for he died in 1790. Theorists since Smith, however, cannot be excused for theorizing about a fictional—indeed impossible!—dimensionless world.

4. Comments on the Initial Version's Conclusions

As to the *conclusions* (purportedly) following from the premises/assumptions of the theory, the following comments can be made:

- a. The conclusion that a household would consume the same array of goods/services as under a regime of prosuming, but work fewer hours, is a *valid* (i.e., logical) conclusion from the premises; but, of course, the latter sort of regime is purely hypothetical. An approximation of such a regime may have existed in certain places at certain times (e.g., homesteaders settling west of the Mississippi River after the Civil War). But such a regime likely never has existed in its pure form anywhere. Nevertheless, the *concept* of a regime of prosumers is useful as a *benchmark* with which a regime of producer-traders can be compared. Certainly it is easy to imagine that the people in the latter regime

would be producing/consuming everything that the people in the former regime would be producing/consuming—plus a little more.

- b. The conclusion that the residents of a producer-trader regime would be able to produce higher-quality goods than those of a prosumer regime is reasonable; the former sort of regime permits the honing of skills. If jobs become too specialized, however, those doing them may find that they (the jobs) lack challenge—so that productivity and quality suffer. Paradoxically, however, in the real-world managers rarely seem to have the intelligence to realize this fact, and “dumb down” jobs even though this may result in lowered productivity/quality.
- c. The conclusion that more kinds of goods would be available with a regime of producer-traders than one of prosumers is a logical one, but only if one assumes the formation of large organizations. Note that such organizations *need not* be hierarchical in structure, with a clear separation of “capitalist” and “worker”—but in real-world terms *usually* are.
- d. The conclusion that all households would spend the same amount of time working, and would obtain the same array of goods/services follows logically from the premises/assumptions stated; but such a conclusion would not be expected to hold in the real world.
- e. The conclusion that a meritocracy would result—and that this meritocracy would be a *classless* society—follows logically from the premises/assumptions. I would add, in fact, that in “predicting” a classless society the initial version of this theory may predict fairly well the social situation as it existed in England prior to the Industrial Revolution. At any rate, Thorstein Veblen stated early in this century:¹⁵² “[The development of a handicraft-petty trade economy in England prior to the Industrial Revolution can be thought of] as a qualified or mitigated (sophisticated) return to the spirit of savagery, or at least as a spiritual reversion looking in that direction, though by no means abruptly reaching the savage plane.” (One must keep in mind here that by “savagery” Veblen meant what today we would term a gatherer-hunter--or forager/cynegetic¹⁵³—mode of existence. In his 1910 “Christian Morals and the Competitive System” Veblen had referred to “the promptings of hereditary savage human nature which make for fellowship and Christian charity.”¹⁵⁴ Veblen's positive assessment of “savagery”—and the life in accord with human nature therewith associated—has been confirmed many times over by subsequent anthropological research.)

19. *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914, p. 204.

153 This latter term was coined by Paul Shepard to convey the truism that gatherer-hunters don't just gather and hunt; they also have a *culture*. *The Sacred Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, p. 5.

154 Reprinted in Veblen's *Essays in Our Changing Order*, edited by Leon Ardzooni. New York: The Viking Press, 1934, p. 209.

Modifications to the Initial Theory

Many of the conclusions of the Initial Version “fit the facts” of the late 1700s fairly well, but were glaringly erroneous in predicting a classless society. The England-Scotland of Smith's time was decidedly *not* classless. And, in what was to become the United States there was (as, e.g. Robert A. Nisbet has pointed out¹⁵⁵) “a distinct feudal character” to colonial society. How, then, can we “fix” the theory so that it will yield variations in household income (if not social class—a concept that involves more than just income)? Let us first “complexify” the theory by changing premise *g*. Rather than assuming equality in industriousness, let us assume variability from one household head to another. What logically follows now?

Operationally, what this change means is that household heads vary in the number of hours devoted to “work” (each week, month, etc.) Household heads therefore vary in the amount they *produce* (expressed in monetary terms—given that a common unit of measurement is required to enable inter-personal comparison across industry groups). Because of this, they vary in what they can *acquire* (note that acquisition is assumed *not* to occur via theft); and given the assumptions that a household head will acquire all that he is *able* to acquire, and that the household will then *consume* all that is acquired, there will be variation between households in “standard of living.”

Note that this conclusion impacts on premise *h*—indicating that the assumptions of the theory are not necessarily independent one of another. What we can postulate here is that although initially all household heads may desire for their households a standard of living common to all, once households begin acquiring different quantities of goods (for whatever reasons) this may affect *motivations*. That is, if a household head is *able* to acquire more than his “target” amount, he may in fact go ahead and *acquire* that “excess”—and then set his “target” at a higher level of acquisition.¹⁵⁶

Although variation in industriousness *can* explain variation in income/standard of living, not all may agree that such variation *does* in fact explain variation in income/standard of living (during, e.g., Smith's time). Rather than using industriousness as an explanatory variable, some may argue that, e.g., variation in *motivation* is the key factor. That household heads vary in how much they *wish* to acquire, which factor affects how hard they work, which factor, in turn, determines how much they acquire—and how much members of the household consume. In a sense, Veblen's “industrial” and “pecuniary” categories¹⁵⁷ (with accompanying mindsets) recognize this possibility. For I would associate more (in terms of hours) work with “industrial” activity than with “pecuniary” activity; but—paradoxically—more income is associated with the latter sort of activity than with the former.

155 “The Social Impact of the [American] Revolution,” in *America's Continuing Revolution*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976, pp. 69-93.

156 Andrew Bard Schmockler has argued that “over time, the market system shapes the values that govern the choices we make.” *The Illusion of Choice: How the Market Economy Shapes Our Destiny*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 12.

157. “Industrial and Pecuniary Employments,” *The Place . . .*, pp. 279-323. First published in *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 1900.

Even after modifying the Initial Version by “relaxing” its assumptions concerning industriousness and/or motivation, the theory may be regarded as still providing an unconvincing explanation of household income variation. What is likely to be the next step in “complexifying” the theory—bringing it closer to the ground (i.e., reality)—is to modify premise *f*. Rather than assuming equality in innate ability, one may assume inequality—and in terms of various “dimensions.” For example, one may assume variation in business acumen, and argue that household income is positively correlated (and strongly so) with degree of business acumen.

If business acumen is a type of *mental* ability (rather than *skill*) which can be plausibly postulated as a factor explaining “success,” so can *other* mental abilities: managerial, leadership, organizational—and cognitive (to list only some possibilities). The latter mental ability is more commonly referred to as *intelligence*; Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (referred to in a later section) often use it in place of “intelligence” in *The Bell Curve*.¹⁵⁸ Given that many (but certainly not all) jobs in the current U. S. economy involve “brain work” rather than skill (mechanical, artistic, musical, woodworking, etc.) or physical labor *per se*, it is certainly plausible to argue that “success” in contemporary America is a function of intelligence/cognitive ability. To argue, that is, that our society is not only a meritocracy today, but one based on intelligence. But is this the case? And is a meritocratic society desirable anyway? Let us address these questions next, prior to identifying and discussing the second layer of our societal theory (and then the *Bell* book).

Meritocracy: What is It?

There are two questions to address here: (1 Is our society a meritocracy? (2 Is a meritocracy a desirable objective?

1. Does a Meritocracy Exist?

Let us assume that a sample is selected of Americans who work for pay, and assume that for each individual in the sample, annual income is determined along with “intelligence.” Assume further that “intelligence” has been measured on a continuous scale—on, indeed, a ratio scale. (Note that no existing IQ test, so far as I know, measures “intelligence” on a true ratio scale.) Assume, finally, that the simple correlation (Pearson's *r*) is determined between these two variables, and that the correlation coefficient is found to be +0.95. That is, a positive—and very strong—relationship is found between the two variables.

Ostensibly, we have found *the* explanation of “success” in the United States. One could, of course, question whether the instrument used for measuring “intelligence” *really* measures what it purports to. But even if one does not question the accuracy of the test involved, one could still question whether one's research had established that the United States is a meritocracy based on *cognitive ability*. Those who *would* make such a claim (tacitly) assume that the magnitude of one's reward (income) is a function of the magnitude of one's societal contribution; and that *that* magnitude, in turn, is a function of one's cognitive ability/intelligence. But note that the hypothetical research referred to above involved no mention of the variable “societal contribution”

¹⁵⁸ Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

I asserted earlier that the Initial Version “predicted” a meritocracy. I can now add that in that earlier discussion I implicitly thought of “hours worked” as a measure of societal contribution (for it was directly correlated with amount of production/output). And given that I tacitly assumed that income would be a function of hours worked, income would be a function of societal contribution (operationalized as hours worked).

If we turn now to our hypothetical situation within which an individual's income is assumed to be a *function* of one's “intelligence” (and not merely *correlated* with intelligence), can we also assert that a meritocracy exists in this situation? Can we think of income as being a function of societal contribution, and societal contribution, in turn, as being a function of intelligence? It is, true, commonly assumed (at least implicitly—and explicitly in the elite-serving Davis-Moore thesis¹⁵⁹) that the income one receives is a measure of one's societal contribution; at any rate, those who receive large incomes usually seem to believe that they are paid well because they contribute much.¹⁶⁰ There is, however, good reason to doubt that income is a good measure of societal contribution. (Indeed, Veblen regarded high-income people as parasites/predators!—but one must admit that operationalizing the variable “societal contribution” in a meaningful way would be a daunting task.) This is an empirical question that has yet to be resolved. In the meantime, we must conclude that there is no good reason for believing that a society within which income is positively (and strongly) correlated with some measure of intelligence is *thereby* a meritocracy.

2. *Is a Meritocracy Desirable?*

In the case of value judgments *per se* it may not be possible to obtain objectivity, i.e., inter-subjective reliability (agreement between people as to what is “good,” what is not). It is, however, possible to cite reasons in support of one's value judgments—and advisable to do so if one wishes to “convert” others to one's way of thinking. Thus, I will do so here. The first point I would make is that our Judaeo-Christian heritage (at least in terms of the *ideals* associated with that tradition¹⁶¹) teaches us to be oriented to our *duties*, rather than our *deserts*, whereas the thrust of meritocratic thinking is on the latter. So that meritocratic thinking is intrinsically unchristian (or, better, un*Jesuan*). But additional comments can also be directed against meritocratic “philosophy.”

Let me first here note (again) that our societal theory—especially in its Initial Version—is heavily dependent on Newtonian physics. An implication of this fact (and one not commonly recognized) is that the conclusions of the theory are thereby made to appear “*natural*” and—as such—*necessary*. What this means is that a valuation in favor of meritocracy seems to be *precluded*: for if society is organized in accordance with certain universal “laws of nature,” it *can't* be changed, right?—so that it is pointless to declare it to be either good *or* bad. Indeed,

¹⁵⁹ Named for Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore. For a discussion of the thesis see: <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/sapp/DavisMoore.html> .

¹⁶⁰ Although I suspect that many of them have guilty consciences—knowing full well that their pay is far more than their worth to society. For example, Donald Trump may not suffer from a guilty conscience, but his contribution to society has been negligible—perhaps even negative!

¹⁶¹ Needless to say, the realities associated with that tradition have been far removed from the ideals

attempts to change it *should not* be attempted; for any such attempts represent “interference” (whether initiated by governmental officials or others). And some might even go so far as to assert that the “laws of nature” involved here were established—and are ordained—by God; so that to attempt to change the society is to rebel against God!

We need to be aware of these points because they help us understand why so many are resistant to rejecting meritocracy as a goal, rooted as the concept is in an evolved version of our basic societal theory. Thus, even if we reject meritocracy as a goal on *religious* grounds, we should not be surprised to encounter others who *accept* meritocracy as a goal (along, perhaps, with Darwinian “survival of the fittest”)—*also* on religious grounds.

A meritocracy is conceived as a society within which household heads receive in proportion to contribution (or at least “merit” in some sense); and is implicitly a society within which household heads use the income they receive to purchase goods for members of the household—and *only* them. That is, household heads are assumed to give nothing to individuals outside the household. Indeed, the relevant theory behind meritocracy gives the household head a *rationale* for not giving to others: “Others are receiving in accordance with what *they* deserve, just as *I* am; if others are poorer than I am, why should I give to them, given that they are receiving what they *deserve*? Indeed, if I help the poor, am I not helping the ‘unfit,’ and thereby contributing to the biological deterioration of the species? Also, given that *my* well-being will be reduced if I give to others, is it not *unreasonable* to expect me to do so.”

One can, of course, object to this rationale on religious grounds (just as one can object to various of the premises of our societal theory on the grounds of a lack of realism, or that they involve making demeaning assumptions about humans—e.g., treating humans as if they were merely economic creatures). That is, one can argue that from different “angles” meritocracy theory appears unChristian (or, better, un*Jesuan*), or otherwise unworthy of acceptance as a goal.

It seems to me, however, that the basic flaw of our societal theory (referring to the first layer)—one which underlies the valuation that meritocracy is good—is that it is highly unrealistic in what it assumes about humans as *biological* entities. I would contend that the human, *qua* human, has certain “design specifications”¹⁶² (not identified here) which s/he shares with all other humans (and that we can infer these specifications (albeit imperfectly) by studying humans in *contemporary* gatherer-hunter societies). (Note, by the way, that I am not denying here that each person has unique needs.) I would contend that among these design specifications is a need not only to *interact* with others, but a need to *do* for others. *Healthy Pleasures*, by Robert Ornstein and David Sobel,¹⁶³ is merely one work providing evidence in support of this assertion. Thus, whereas the theory underlying meritocracy seems to assert that humans derive happiness from—and only from—the consumption of material goods, the truth of the matter is rather different. Indeed, people are *foolish* to allow themselves to become “possessed” by this assumption, for their well-being is not served well by it.

¹⁶² See, e.g., George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977.

¹⁶³. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1989.

Not only is it the case that individuals, *qua* individuals, are not served well by this component of our societal theory (referring here specifically to the first layer); neither is our *society*—or, indeed, our *species*. For meritocratic thinking—insofar as it is rooted in biological assumptions—utterly “misses the boat” concerning the relevance of human biology (something Veblen seemingly recognized, without, however, applying his brilliant and iconoclastic mind to the subject). For since the “Fall”¹⁶⁴ from a gatherer-hunter existence into a “civilized” one based (initially) on agriculture, human biology has changed but little, whereas ways of life have changed drastically.¹⁶⁵ Whereas prior to the Agricultural Revolution there was a rather good “fit” between human biology and the gatherer-hunter way of life, the ways of life which have developed since then (largely in response to technological developments—especially recently) have become ever more removed from a “natural” way of life. We all, of course, have some “built-in” capacity to adjust, from a neurophysiological standpoint, to our current way of life. But our “plasticity” is not infinite.¹⁶⁶

Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that virtually *all* of our current societal problems have their basis in the fact that our current way of life is an “unnatural” one; and that this “discrepancy” is also the basic reason why humans (led by Americans) are pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (and otherwise assaulting Gaia)—thereby putting the human species itself in jeopardy.

The valuation that meritocracy is a proper goal should, therefore, be rejected not only because it fails to serve people well *as individuals*, but because it endangers our species. A reorientation of our thinking is needed, but I am not among those (remember Charles A. Reich's *The Greening of America* of several years ago?¹⁶⁷) who insist that what is *primarily* needed, at present, is the widespread adoption of a new “worldview.” Rather, I believe that worldview change is needed *in conjunction with* institutional change (something that I alluded to in, e.g., my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” on this site.

A final point that I would make is that the meritocratic theory that I have discussed above is embedded in microeconomic theory that is taught in Economics departments in universities throughout the United States (and elsewhere). Given that such theory is fundamentally unJesuan—because it is oriented to what one “merits” rather than what (per Judaeo-Christian tradition) God *wills* for one—I find it highly ironic that even “Christian” universities have Economics departments. Were courses offered that taught one how to kill,¹⁶⁸ educated

¹⁶⁴ Warren Johnson, *Muddling Toward Frugality*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1978, p. 39 ff.

¹⁶⁵ For a brief discussion of relevance here see “The Conflict Between Culture and Biology in Human Affairs,” pp. 318 – 324 in David P. Barash, *Sociology and Behavior*. New York: Elsevier North-Holland, Inc., 1977.

¹⁶⁶ For an excellent discussion of relevance here see Noel T. Boaz, *Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

¹⁶⁷ New York: Random House, 1970.

¹⁶⁸ Such as at “our” “School of the Americas” (since renamed).

Christians would denounce them; why, then, don't they similarly denounce courses that “merely” teach people that selfishness is “natural” (and good). Are we so “possessed” by the idea of Original Sin that we refuse to accept Paul's declaration that a change in “consciousness” (via what he termed the “Holy Spirit”) is possible; and that the “fruits” of such “Spirit possession” include (*Galatians* 5:22-23) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control?

The “Upper” Layer of Our Societal Theory

If the name that can be given the “lower” level of our societal theory is “*laissez-faire*,” then the appropriate name for the “upper” layer is “social Darwinism.” As there are certain commonalities between the two layers, it will be useful to begin by identifying those common elements.

1. Common Features of the Two Layers

I see social Darwinism as having roots in both classical economic theory (whose initiator was Adam Smith) and Darwinism; it is not surprising, then, that there would be certain commonalities between layer one of our societal theory (i.e., that with its origin in Smith's work—and especially the “modified” version of that layer) and layer two (the social Darwinian component). Let me, then, list the features that these two layers have in common:

- a. Individuals are assumed to be motivated by a desire to avoid pain and to seek happiness. That is, the individual is seen as a rational choice-maker who acts as if s/he lives in a void—i.e., acts without reference to other individuals. Even since the writings of such luminaries as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, B. F. Skinner, and Viktor Frankl, this view of motivation has persisted.¹⁶⁹
- b. Individuals are assumed to gain happiness from—and only from—the consumption of goods/services. Again, this assumption has persisted despite the efforts of Freud and others to present alternate views. And not only has the assumption persisted; it has been *operative*: most members of our society act as if they believe that happiness comes from—and only from—the consumption of goods/services. That's primarily why they seek high incomes.
- c. The focus (ostensibly, at any rate) of these theories has been on explaining (*rationalizing* might be a more apt term) relative position in the society: relative position specifically of household heads (or households), position being measured by income. The theories have *not* been oriented to explaining well-being, or even behavior, for that matter. Rather, they have made certain *assumptions* regarding behavior and well-being, then gone on to explain relative position in society.

¹⁶⁹ I don't mean to suggest that none of these luminaries has had an influence on our thinking; but the sorts of explanations they offer seem to gain some “celebrity” for awhile, then fade away. Evidently our “System” doesn't “like” the sorts of explanations they have offered; the System humors them for awhile, then casts them on the scrapheap.

- d. In explaining relative position, they do so on the basis of individual behavior, and *assume* that individual behavior is explainable on the basis of individual choice. Or if not individual choice, then biology—or, they explain individual choice *itself* on the basis of biology (as if “choice” is then involved)! That is, they explain behavior in *psychologistic* terms—without, e.g., reference to sociological, anthropological, or even psychiatric research findings.
- e. The theories assume that a meritocracy will arise naturally (unless certain impeding forces are operating)—i.e., that the more one deserves, the more one will receive (in income). Furthermore, they assume that a meritocracy is *good*—the very term “meritocracy” having positive connotations. They assume that what one receives, in income, is an indicator of what one contributes to the society. Given that the more one contributes, the more one deserves in return, and that one receives in proportion to what one contributes, it follows that what one receives is an indicator of what one has contributed.
- f. The assumed relationship between contribution, desert, and income received has important policy implications for both the individual and the (national) government. At the individual level, these theories assert that it is unnatural for an individual to give to another, for this would reduce *one’s own* well-being. Strictly speaking, one should not acquire dependents, for this detracts from one’s well-being. But as the logical outcome of *such* activity (rather, non-activity) would be an eventual reduction of the given society’s population to zero, we tend not to think very rigorously about this assertion. Rather, we tend to take as simply “given”—thus not requiring explanation—that people will form households and acquire dependents.

Because behavior directed at helping others (outside the household) is “unnatural,” it is unexpected in both theories. It is also unexpected because those in need do not *deserve* help: they are already receiving what they deserve, so that one is excused from helping them. The fact that they are in need is to be ignored in favor of recognition of the “fact” that they are receiving in proportion to their contribution—i.e., receiving in proportion to desert—and *that’s* what counts. In other words, a certain *ideology* is allowed to govern one’s relationships with others.

To point out the “obvious” fact that this attitude is contrary to that associated with the Jesus portrayed in the canonical gospels should be unnecessary. But the fact of the matter is that Christianity is, and has been, but tenuously related to the Jesus of the gospels. It has tended to emphasize right belief and the participation in right ritual, rather than pursuit of The Way (referred to several times in Acts). Thus, it should come as no surprise to learn that Christianity has not been in conflict with these theories.

At a governmental level several *policy* recommendations follow from the above assumptions. Those lacking in income should be encouraged to out-migrate, and discouraged from in-migrating—for they contribute little to the functioning of the society. They should also be discouraged from reproducing (via attempts to educate

them, by giving them birth control devices, or by sterilizing them);¹⁷⁰ for, after all, their children are likely to be non-contributors as well. Perhaps these “vermin” should even be exterminated, given their low value to the society—given the “fact,” even, that they are a “drag” on the society.

- f. The last feature that I would like to point out regarding these theories is that they tacitly assume that the society should/must be taken as a *given*. That is, the society should be thought of as simply “there,” and people must, then, simply adapt to it. Implicitly, there is the assumption here that society *cannot* change (or, at any rate, cannot be changed via human effort). One suspects, however, that underlying *that* assumption is the valuation that society *should not* change.

Why not? Because societal system change could very well result in an erosion of the position of the elite. What we have, then, with these theories is sets of ideas which purport to explain why things are the way they are (so far as relative position in the society is concerned), but which *in actuality* serve the interests of the elite; that is, they are *ideologies*. They tacitly suggest that societal system change brought about by human intention is neither possible nor desirable; but in doing so they merely *rationalize* a societal system which serves the interests of some at the expense of others. Which, indeed, *currently* is (given the “global warming” problem) serving the interests of *none* of us—and is thereby dangerous, and therefore in urgent need of change.

The Social Darwinism Theory: Introduction

The following paragraph occurs in Chapter III. (“Struggle for Existence”) of Charles Darwin’s [1809 – 1882] *The Origin of Species*, under the heading “The Bearing of Struggle for Existence on Natural Selection”:¹⁷¹

Again, it may be asked, how is it that varieties, which I have called incipient species, become ultimately converted into good and distinct species which in most cases obviously differ from each other far more than do the varieties of the same species? How do those groups of species, which constitute what are called distinct genera, and which differ from each other more than do the species of the same genus, arise? All these results, as we shall more fully see in the next chapter, follow from the struggle for life. Owing to this struggle, variations, however slight and from whatever cause proceeding, if they be in any degree profitable to the individuals of a species, in their infinitely complex relations to other organic beings and to their physical conditions of life, will tend to the preservation of such individuals, and will generally be inherited by the offspring. The offspring, also, will thus have a better chance of surviving,

¹⁷⁰ For an extended discussion of eugenics see Allen Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976. See also Richard C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

¹⁷¹ Darwin’s book is Vol. 11 of the Harvard Classics series, edited by Charles W. Eliot. It is available online at: <http://www.bartleby.com/11/3001.html>. *Origin* was initially published in 1859, and went through six editions during Darwin’s lifetime. The Bartleby site does not specify which edition of *Origin* is on their web site, but I will assume it is the sixth edition.

for, of the many individuals of any species which are periodically born, but a small number can survive. I have called this principle, by which each slight variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection, in order to mark its relation to man's power of selection [i.e., breeding, or "artificial selection"]. But the expression often used by Mr. Herbert Spencer [1820 – 1903¹⁷²] of the Survival of the Fittest is more accurate, and is sometimes equally convenient. We have seen that man by [artificial] selection [i.e., breeding] can certainly produce great results, and can adapt organic beings to his own uses, through the accumulation of slight but useful variations, given to him by the hand of Nature. But Natural Selection, as we shall hereafter see, is a power incessantly ready for action, and is as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art.

Despite the claim of some scholars that the "philosophy" of social Darwinism is not rooted in Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, the above selection from the book clearly falsifies that claim. True, it was Spencer, not Darwin, who first used the phrase "survival of the fittest" in the context of a specific discussion of human society, and also true that Spencer introduced the phrase several years *prior* to the publication of *Origin*. And, it is true that Darwin didn't even use the phrase in the first edition of *Origin*—not using it until the fifth edition. However, there is good reason for referring to "social Darwinism" rather than "social Spencerism": Darwin's 1859 book was far more influential than Spencer's 1851 book.

The basic ideas associated with Darwin's theory (if we can call it that¹⁷³) are as follows:

- The phenomenon of "excess births" is associated with all species.
- Given that more individuals of any given species are born than can survive (given the "carrying capacity" of the given area occupied), some must die.
- The excess births precipitate intraspecific competition for sustenance, it being tacitly assumed that all individuals are "on their own" upon birth.
- Those individuals with traits best enabling them to win in this intraspecific competition¹⁷⁴ will survive (and, at a later point, possibly—but not necessarily—reproduce), with the losers dying (from a failure to obtain the necessary sustenance for survival).

¹⁷² Spencer first used this phrase in his 1851 *Social Statics*. See the discussion of Spencer at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survival_of_the_fittest

¹⁷³ It is not at all clear that the characteristics of his concept of Natural Selection are such as to warrant the label theory. "Model" might be a better label—as there are resemblances between Darwin's concept and the pioneering modeling work done several decades earlier by the German estate owner Johann Heinrich von Thünen [1780 – 1850]. For information regarding him go to <http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/profiles/thunen.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ Note that there is no specification, in Darwin's "theory," regarding *when* this competition occurs? Does it occur on a continual basis? Does it occur only during a birthing season? One would assume that Darwin meant the latter, given that such an assumption would—unlike the first one—be realistic (i.e., a phenomenon with normal occurrence in the real world).

- Survivors can be said to be “fit;” and of the group of survivors, it can be said that there had been “survival of the fittest.”¹⁷⁵
- This process, occurring year after year results, in *directionality* with the species. That is, steady, slow, “progressive” change occurs over time in the given species in terms of the trait(s) that confers survival in the intraspecific competition (along with any traits that happen to be correlated with this trait(s))—such that if the value for each, of a succession of years, is plotted on a graph, the result will be an upward-sloping, straight line.¹⁷⁶
- This change, occurring over a “sufficiently” long period of time, is sufficient to enable one to assert that (monotypic¹⁷⁷) evolution has occurred.

The reason that one can think of Darwin’s “theory” of Natural Selection as being the basis for the “philosophy” of social Darwinism is that those who developed social Darwinism started with the view that *variation* exists with people (an assumption, note, which is at variance with the theory based on Adam Smith’s work) *and* that competition exists in the human realm—both of which assumptions derive from Darwin. Note, however, that whereas with Darwin intraspecific competition was precipitated by the fact of excess births, no such factor is associated with social Darwinism. Rather, the implication is that competition occurs because it is simply “natural”—i.e., individuals are “programmed” to compete with their fellows.

Because of social Darwinism’s derivation from Darwin, it will be useful to clarify the meaning of social Darwinism by comparing it to Darwin’s theory—first in terms of similarities, then differences.

1. Darwinian Natural Selection and Social Darwinism: Similarities

- a. Change is a central feature of both.
- b. In both cases the change that is involved is of a *progressive* nature.

¹⁷⁵ Note that the “fitness” alluded to here pertains to fitness relative to what might be termed a *sociological* situation (i.e., one of intraspecific competition); the variable(s) that confers “fitness,” then, is one that gives individuals an advantage in this competition. Although it is commonly assumed that the fitness referred to by Darwin refers to fitness relative to the *physical environment*, such an assumption is wholly unjustified. Survivors, in this “theory,” in the first place survive, *implicitly*, because they fit the physical environment they happen to live in, and survive, in the second place, because they *also* are able to win in the intraspecific competition in which they are forced, by circumstances, to engage in. Note that the trait(s) that enables an individual to adapt (and thereby survive) to the physical environment is not necessarily the same trait(s) that enables the individual to survive the intraspecific competition. Indeed, it is highly unlikely—in real-world terms—that the same variable(s) would be involved in both cases.

¹⁷⁶ Note that the “theory” makes no reference to whether or not—or how—this change in “competitive fitness” impacts “physical environmental fitness.” This (along with the problem noted in the previous footnote) is just another example of the many intellectual problems associated with Darwin’s “theory.”

¹⁷⁷ As distinguished from *polytypic* evolution. “Monotypic” evolution is the change, over time, in a single species—sufficient to justify asserting that a new species has emerged. “Polytypic” evolution is the emergence of new species from an existing species.

- c. With both there is a focus on “best” individuals.
- d. In both cases the “best” are agents of the change that is central to the theory/philosophy.
- e. In both cases the “best” have inherited the trait(s) that makes them so.
- f. In both cases rate of change is of interest.
- g. Competition is involved with both, and there is an interest in its cause (although perhaps less so with social Darwinism).
- h. Competition is associated with both, and aggressiveness is seen (if but implicitly) as a consequence of competition.
- i. The environment plays a role in both.

2. Darwinian Natural Selection and Social Darwinism: Differences

- a. With Darwinian natural selection, the change is of a *biological* nature, and involves change of a *species* (not individuals, note). With social Darwinism the change is in the *society* of which people are members, and there is no biological change in the (human) population. In fact, the social Darwinian holds (seemingly) that biological evolution ended with humans (the apex of evolution), but that when *biological* evolution ended (human) *societal* evolution began—so that societal (“cultural”) evolution is, in a sense, continuous with biological evolution.
- b. With Darwinian natural selection, the species becomes more advanced in some sense over time—perhaps more complexly organized,¹⁷⁸ whereas with social Darwinism a society advances in the sense that more is produced/consumed *per capita*—so that the average level of happiness is constantly increasing. Happiness is not a part of Darwinian natural selection theory. (We do, however, find this curious paragraph in *Origin* (with “happy” in the last line):

It is good thus to try in imagination to give to any one species an advantage over another. Probably in no single instance should we know what to do. This ought to convince us of our ignorance on the mutual relations of all organic beings; a conviction as necessary as it is difficult to acquire. All that we can do, is to keep steadily in mind that each organic being is striving to increase in a geometrical ratio; that each at some period of its life, during some season of the year, during each generation or at intervals, has to struggle for life and to suffer great destruction. When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.

178. Darwin may have *thought* that his theory had a species becoming more advanced in the sense of becoming more complexly organized (i.e., qualitative change), but the fact of the matter is that his theory allows only for *quantitative* change (i.e., more of the same).

This occurs under the heading “Struggle for Life Most Severe between Individuals and Varieties of the Same Species,” in Chapter III (“Struggle for Existence”).¹⁷⁹

- c. With Darwinian natural selection, the “best” *survive* and others die prematurely. With social Darwinism the “best” become most *successful*, and no one dies prematurely (in the theory, at any rate).
- d. With Darwinian natural selection, the function of the “best” is to produce progeny; that is how they are agents of change (of the species). With social Darwinism the “best” are agents of *societal* change—via the innovations they (or those they hire) introduce (intellectual, technological, and organizational).
- e. With Darwinian natural selection, the trait (whatever it happens to be) that confers survival advantage is a constant over time (i.e., from generation to generation). With social Darwinism, as societal development occurs, the trait(s) that confers success changes over time—it being intelligence currently.
- f. With Darwinian natural selection, species change is slow and steady. With social Darwinism, societal change increases at an increasing rate.
- g. With Darwinian natural selection, competition is seen as caused by “excess” births. With social Darwinism, competition is (assumedly) seen as resulting from an innate desire to maximize one’s happiness (by achieving the highest position possible—one, thus, with the most remuneration)—competition necessitated by the fact that different incomes are associated with different positions.
- h. With Darwinian natural selection, competition results in aggressiveness becoming “hard-wired” into the species. (This point was never stated explicitly by Darwin, but is implicit in his discussion.) With social Darwinism, people are seen as innately selfish, but competition is not necessarily seen as resulting in a “hard-wiring” of the human species. That is, aggressiveness is seen as a necessary component in success (along with intelligence—in today’s society), but is not necessarily seen as an inherited trait—*given that the “weeding out” that occurs with Darwinian natural selection does not occur in the human realm*. If a social Darwinist finds (in researching contemporary United States society) that there is not a perfect positive correlation between position in the society and intelligence, s/he would explain this away by arguing that the variable “aggressiveness” is independent of intelligence.
- i. Although the environment is involved with both, there are two differences. First, the environment in Darwinian natural selection is (implicitly) the *physical setting* along with other lifeforms, and explicitly the *social* environment (i.e., the competitive situation); with social Darwinism, the environment is just *society*. Second, with Darwinian natural selection the environment remains constant over time, while a species in that environment changes biologically. With social Darwinism, on the other hand, the societal environment is constantly *changing* over time, whereas humans remain basically

¹⁷⁹ See <http://www.bartleby.com/11/3006.html> .

the same biologically (this latter fact, being, however implicit—and playing no role whatsoever in the “philosophy”).

In conclusion, although there are important differences between Darwinian natural selection theory and social Darwinism (surprise! surprise!), there are also a number of important similarities—such that it is clear that it was Darwinian natural selection theory which inspired social Darwinism. It is true that some scholars wish to downplay the “genetic” relationship that Social Darwinism has with Darwinian natural selection theory. But I find it impossible to deny that social Darwinism, as a social philosophy, owes its very existence to Darwinian natural selection theory. So that if the latter had never been published, it is at least conceivable that social Darwinism never would have arisen.¹⁸⁰

A Particular Example of Social Darwinism

A little over a decade ago a notorious book was published of the social Darwinian *genre* that gave particular attention to intelligence. Upon the publication of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s *The Bell Curve*¹⁸¹ in late 1994, numerous commentaries were published. For example, *The Economist* published an historically-oriented piece on “Measuring Intelligence” in its December 24th—January 6th issue. *The New Republic* devoted its October 31 number to a series of articles on the book, along with “Race, Genes and I. Q.—An Apologia,” written by Murray specifically for that issue. Etc.¹⁸² Etc.

Given that *The Bell Curve* was published by an ostensibly reputable publisher (The Free Press), and has all the trappings of a solid academic work (exceptional length, footnotes, charts, methodological discussion, bibliography, etc.), one would think that the book presented original—and important—findings. In fact, however, (a) the book lacks originality, (b) is based largely on suspect research by “fringe” people, (c) evinces little sensitivity to methodological problems in operationalizing “intelligence” (and even “race”), (d) is weakly reasoned, and (e) uses a peculiar mode of expression for expository writing. (Orlando Patterson, e.g., has asserted regarding this latter point that the book’s “mealy mouthed style of discourse is irritating in the extreme”¹⁸³—and I agree.) In short, the book was obviously published for reasons other than the merit of its contents.

180 This assumes, of course, that the comparable philosophy of Herbert Spencer (“social Spencerianism”) would not have “caught on” in the absence of Darwin’s *Origin*. Therefore, my assertion here is of a speculative nature—and can only be such.

181. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

182. A rather academic—but also rather uninteresting (!)—book on the subject is Claude S. Fischer, Michael Hout, Martin Sánchez Jankowski, Samuel R. Lucas, Ann Swidler, and Kim Voss, *Inequality By Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

183. Orlando Patterson, “For Whom the Bell Curves,” in *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence, and the Future of America*, edited by Steven Fraser. New York: Basic Books, 1995, p. 193.

Why was it published? To make money for its authors (or—in the case of the late Herrnstein—his estate) and its publisher? To create more divisiveness in our society? To help the right-wing push its agenda in the political realm and elsewhere? I will offer some of my own opinions regarding this matter later. But what I wish to do here, first, is summarize, and then analyze, the argument of *Bell*. The topic at hand here is social Darwinism, but I have chosen especially to “cover” that topic by focusing on a specific—and fairly recent—“academic” work that was written from a social Darwinistic perspective. Not that the authors *claimed* to be (or to have been) social Darwinists; but that is beside the point: they are/were.

In discussing the *Bell* book, I will first outline the argument of the book, next present its conclusions/recommendations, then comment on its arguments/conclusions, and, finally, offer some concluding remarks (so far as social Darwinism is concerned).

1. The Book's Argument, in Brief

Because *The Bell Curve* is a large book (well over 800 pages), and its argument is not presented particularly well, its argument can be—and has been—perceived differently by different individuals. (See, e.g., the selections in *The Bell Curve Wars*, cited above.) What follows is the argument of *The Bell Curve* as I see it, presented as a series of statements—and in an order that I perceive as logical.

- a. Intelligence (or “cognitive ability”) is largely inherited.
- b. IQ tests measure intelligence.
- c. Given a large sample of people, with degree of “intelligence” (i.e., IQ) being determined for each individual, the scores will fall into a normal frequency distribution—the familiar bell curve.
- d. For a large population, the genetic composition will remain virtually constant over time; thus, the “intelligence” frequency distribution at T_1 will coincide with that for T_2 , etc.—at least in the sense that a bell curve shape will be maintained.
- e. “Success” in the United States is becoming more and more a function of IQ (= intelligence); i.e., the U. S. is becoming ever more a “meritocracy” based on IQ/intelligence.
- f. The occupational realm, in “advanced” societies such as ours, is changing such that positions requiring higher intelligence are expanding relative to those requiring lower intelligence.
- g. A higher birth rate is associated with low-IQ people in our society than with high-IQ ones.
- h. Given that babies born to low-IQ parents are likely to be low in IQ, and point g above, *average* (in terms of raw scores) intelligence in the U. S. is declining.

- i. Given "fact" *f* above in conjunction with "fact" *h*, a discrepancy is developing between the distribution of *actual* intelligence in the population, and the distribution of *required* intelligence (for "operating" the economy).

2. *The Book's Conclusions/Recommendations*

The growing discrepancy referred to under point *i* in the previous subsection has (argue the authors of *Bell*) negative implications both for the unintelligent in our society, and for all others as well. Regarding, first, the unintelligent: the growing discrepancy implies more unemployment and ill-employment, hence increased poverty and loss of self-esteem—with consequent increased alcohol/drug abuse, drug dealing, single-parent families, teen-age pregnancies, domestic violence, prostitution, crimes against persons and property, etc. In short, ill-being, and pathological behavior stemming from ill-being.

And regarding others: the growing discrepancy implies an increased possibility of being a victim of assaults, burglaries, and murders. And, it means increased taxes to support welfare programs, police forces, courts (with associated judges, lawyers, bailiffs, etc.), and jails/prisons (with their personnel).

Now whereas, in science, arguments are usually *descriptive* in the sense that they explain (or predict—but not just in a temporal sense), what we have here with *The Bell Curve* is a *prescriptive* argument: from the 9 statements/premises listed above, along with the conclusions derived from them, certain "shoulds" ostensibly follow logically.

- First, certain policy recommendations for (white) decision-makers, particularly those in the federal government: discourage low-intelligence people from reproducing ("breeding") by providing them with information/education and contraceptives, and removing any incentives for making babies. Although Herrnstein and Murray carefully avoid advocating any explicitly eugenics measures (e.g., forced sterilization of the "feeble-minded"), the tone of their book is supportive of such measures.
- Second, though, the book offers certain "shoulds" directed at those of low IQ/"intelligence" (as if they could be expected to be readers of the book!). It counsels them to stop striving for success in the world of work—for their low intelligence militates against their attaining any measure of success (unless helped along by "affirmative action"). They should, rather, learn to accept their low intelligence—and consequent low position in society—gracefully. As Leon Wieseltier has put it, the low (per Herrnstein and Murray) must learn to "find happiness in lowliness. They must learn a strange mixture of resignation and self-love, and abandon any ideal of advancement, and reject all standards of intellectual strenuousness, and subsist in a condition of dreamlessness bordering on mindlessness."¹⁸⁴

3. *Comments on the Conclusions/Recommendations*

First, let me comment on the argument itself, point by point:

184. "The Lowerers," in *The New Republic*, Vol. 211 (October 31, 1994), pp. 22-23.

a. Comments on the Argument

- Given that psychometricians conceive of “intelligence” as a fixed quality, and that inherited qualities tend to be fixed ones, it is virtually inevitable that psychometricians will *assume* that “intelligence” is largely inherited, and mindlessly dismiss suggestions to the contrary. Put another way, psychometricians tend to conceive “intelligence” in such a way that the *explanation* of “intelligence” is embedded in the concept itself—not an advisable practice in science.¹⁸⁵ For in scientific work description and explanation should be regarded as in two distinctly different—and separate—realms. But beyond this point, it should be noted that “intelligence” is not easy to define in a manner that will be agreed upon by most people; and that insofar as we *can* define—conceptually and operationally—“intelligence,” it seems clear that “intelligence” is not *just* a matter of genetics. If, for example, of two identical twins born in the United States one were immediately transferred to the Yequana tribe in Venezuela, it is unlikely that these two children would develop mentally in a similar manner. Indeed, the very meaning of “intelligence” would differ between the two societies.
- More accurately, IQ tests tend to be (merely, I might add) *predictors* of school performance; some would add that all they really *are*, indeed, is measures of school performance—and that they aren't even very good at that task. The big problem here, of course, is arriving at an agreed-upon *conceptual* definition of “intelligence” which can be used as the basis for operationalization/measurement efforts.
- Just as “intelligence” tests are “fixed” (“standardized” is the technical term) so that they will not yield a difference between the average male and average female, so are “test” questions chosen to ensure that results will fall into a bell curve. That is, testers have begun with the assumption that IQ *must* be normally distributed, and have then selected questions that *yield* such a distribution. Thus, there is nothing “natural” about the fact that IQ scores fall into a normal distribution.
- See the comment under point *1c*.
- Intelligence—however measured—is a component of “success,” to be sure, but is clearly not the *only* component. Again, the basic problem in

185. “Dual-purpose” words are fairly common in our language, but should be avoided in scientific discourse. For example, the word “lazy” is a dual-purpose one in that it is used to *describe* inactivity on the part of people, and also *explain* that inactivity (for the word implies that one who is inactive is so because s/he has *chosen* so to be). Given that scientists seek to explain, and to do so in an explicit, above-board fashion, they should avoid the use of words that embed within them an explanation. Perhaps the rest of us should be equally circumspect in our use of language.

assessing the realism of this premise is that “intelligence” itself lacks an unambiguous conceptual meaning.

- If point *If* is true, and if average intelligence is a temporal constant, it is not clear how these intelligence-requiring positions will get filled. And if average intelligence is on the *decline* (see the eighth point below), filling such positions will become a *real* problem. It is reasonable to project that more and more jobs will require more and more education/training (James W. Wall, of *The Christian Century*, several years ago referred to a rising class of “symbol players!”), but unreasonable to claim that more and more jobs will require more and more intelligence—particularly if one assumes that an individual's intelligence level is basically fixed at birth.
- The relationship posited under point *Ig* is basically true, and is found in most—but not all—“advanced” societies.
- Regarding point *Ih*: Here the authors seem to accept the “blending” theory of inheritance used by Charles Darwin—a theory which has been passé for decades, of course. Strangely, the authors don't seem to be “into” modern “genocentric” biology, to say nothing of recognizing the possibility of, e.g., “cytoplasmic” inheritance—to borrow terms from Brian Goodwin's recent *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots*.
- If statements *If* and *Ih* are true, it follows that statement *Ii* is true.

b. Comments on the Book's Conclusions/Recommendations

As to the book's conclusions/recommendations: Currently, the unemployment rate in the United States is reasonably low (except in the opinion of those who are unemployed!)—although the actual rate is likely much higher than the official one (especially in inner-city areas). And what unemployment there is, likely is attributable to factors *in addition* to the discrepancy alleged by Herrnstein and Murray. Their emphasis, in discussing the discrepancy they identify, is on what it means for the unintelligent, and how this represents a “drain” on the economy. Peculiarly, they don't address what the alleged lack of *intelligent* people might mean for the smooth operation of the economy. The fact of the matter is that the economy has many positions for people lacking in intelligence and skills, and this will continue to be true—the problem people in such jobs face being that they are rarely paid enough to live with even a minimum of comfort (in large part because those jobs tend not to be unionized).

4. Concluding Bell Remarks

In offering my concluding comments on the *Bell* book I would, first, point out that although the recommendations offered by Herrnstein and Murray flow from their conclusions, and their conclusions logically follow (ostensibly) from their premises, virtually all of their premises lack in realism. This means not only that their conclusions lack a firm empirical basis; so do their

recommendations lack a sound basis. Thus, one has reasons for asserting that the recommendations of Herrnstein and Murray are in conformance with their *prejudices* (and the prejudices of their financial sponsor—the Bradley Foundation) rather than with objective truths and sound value judgments.

Second, a key value judgment underlying the book's discussion is that a meritocracy is good. Now “meritocracy” is one of those words in our language with positive connotations, so that it is easy to conclude that a meritocracy is “obviously” a good thing. In fact, however, the concept (as I argued earlier) of a meritocracy is unJesuan, if not *anti*-Jesuan. For the thrust of Judaeo-Christian teaching is that one's orientation should not be toward what one *merits/deserves*; rather, it should be toward one's *duties/obligations*—especially relative to others who are less fortunate¹⁸⁶. In short, one should seek to not do anything that would adversely affect the well-being (physical, psychological, spiritual) of others; one should, in fact, attempt to have a *positive* effect on the lives of one's fellow human beings (the point emphasized in Matthew 25). Whether, in doing so, one will be rewarded in a supposed afterlife for this sort of behavior is not, in my value system, what should guide one's actions. Rather, one should behave in this manner because it's the *right* thing to do—and behavior that is required simply to be true to one's human nature. For although our society makes it difficult for our true natures to become expressed, there is plenty of evidence out there in support of the assertion that our true natures are *positive*.

Third, it will be noted that in presenting what I perceive to be the argument of *The Bell Curve* I made no explicit reference to “race.” Have I missed the point of the book?—given that the book clearly *does* discuss “race.” Perhaps. But as I see Herrnstein and Murray's central concern being the discrepancy referred to above under point *i* of their argument, I see no *rational* reason for bringing “race” into the discussion.

Why, then, *did* Herrnstein and Murray bring up the matter of “race”—make it, in fact, a central preoccupation of their book? Here I would speculate that Herrnstein and Murray injected “race” into their book precisely because they knew that it is a sensitive, controversial subject. They knew that it is already a divisive issue, and that their book—if properly “hyped”—could further divide the American population along a racial fault line.

Why would they want to do this (while disingenuously claiming to be courageous pioneers on an intellectual frontier)? First, let me state that I don't literally think they *want* increased divisiveness along “racial” lines in this society: although I see them as engaging (albeit unconsciously) in diversionary tactics, I have difficulty conceiving that would *consciously* have conceived and implemented a sophisticated strategy of *any* kind. Rather, I see them as guided by motives of which they have been but dimly aware. Specifically, I see them as sensing that a certain mindset/worldview (briefly, what Charles A. Reich referred to as a “Consciousness III” mentality in his 1970 classic, *The Greening of America*) is emerging in America, and that this

¹⁸⁶ I use the word “fortunate” here deliberately, not because it is commonly used in our society (without thought of the word's meaning), but because I disagree with the assertion that the rich deserve their wealth. I fully realize that “fortunate”—like “merit”—is a “loaded” term that contains within it a value judgment, but am convinced that it is simply not true that those who have little have been paid in accordance with their contribution to society. And even if they have not, my value system is such that I would insist that they *deserve* more anyway: *no one*, in my value system, is deserving of living “at the edge.”

emergence poses a threat to the Existing Order—and to those comfortable in the Existing Order. People such as Herrnstein and Murray (and those for whom they are lackeys) don't want this to occur; by intensifying the tendency of Americans to think in black/white terms, they hope (if we can use that term for an unconscious feeling) to block the further emergence of a “Consciousness III” mentality.

The dominant “consciousness” in America is one that is control-oriented, obsessed with power as an end, fixated on materialistic accumulation (and “success,” achievement, celebrity), is hedonistic, competitive, etc. This consciousness is an integral part of the societal system: it “produces” the societal system, and the societal system in turn produces it. But that “consciousness” may be in danger of losing its dominance in favor of what I have briefly called a “Consciousness III” one—which “consciousness” *would* be a threat to the Existing Order and those (such as Herrnstein and Murray) who benefit from it. It is no wonder that beneficiaries of the Existing Order have been engaging in various efforts to block this development (and consequent societal system change)—efforts with objectives of which they themselves are not fully aware.

It can be argued that societal system change is needed here and elsewhere for a variety of reasons—so that it is unfortunate that some are “trying” to prevent such change. True, those working to block such change may be acting in accord with the short-term interests of themselves and others who are beneficiaries of the Existing Order. But the long-run interests of *all* of us—including the likes of Herrnstein and Murray—would be served by societal system change (of the right sort).

The effect of books such as *The Bell Curve*, however, is to divert attention away from the desirability of societal system change by focusing on black/white differences—and “trying” to widen the gulf. Indeed, the implicit message of the book to those of low intelligence—and to blacks in particular—is, “Please remain a part of the Existing Order; please don't, e.g., exit the Existing Order for a subsociety within the Larger Society. We need you in the Existing Order, for your presence helps keep wages down; we need you to exploit in low-wage jobs—jobs that need to be done by somebody if the rest of us are to live in comfort; and we need you to serve as scapegoats. So, please, please, remain in the Existing Order, and learn to be content in your lowliness.”

There is a better way of using biology than that exemplified by *The Bell Curve*, but this is not the place to expound on that matter. Suffice it to say that if one's underlying orientation is to what individuals (allegedly) *deserve*, one will use biology in one way. But if one's fundamental orientation is to what individuals' *duties* are, one will use biology in a rather different way. The use of a *desert* orientation may very well eventuate in the extinction of our species—so that it would be desirable for Americans and others to adopt a different orientation. Indeed, such an orientation may be emerging—insofar as a “Consciousness III” mentality has a duty orientation. But will a “salvific” orientation actually become dominant—or develop quickly enough? I wish I could give a positive response to that question!

Whether it will or not, societal system change is what we *all* need, not only for well-being reasons (for those currently with ill-being), but survival ones as well. And *if* it is to come about, those with what might be termed a Jesuan—or, more broadly, a “green”—consciousness will

need to lead the way. Given that the focus of the above discussion has been on a book which emphasizes “race”—and is, indeed, racist in doing so—it is perhaps fitting that I conclude this essay by “putting in a good word” for blacks—arguing, in a sense, that the proportion of blacks in the United States with a New Society mentality may be substantially higher than is the case with whites. So that the leadership in creating a New Society could very well be black. (Not, though, that we should expect Barack Obama—or any politician, for that matter—to “lead us to the promised land.”)

Note that I am not here referring to, or advocating, a black separatist movement; nor am I referring to, or advocating, the emergence of a fully integrated society along “racial” lines. Rather, I am referring to a movement led by people (black, white, and others) with a Jesuan / “green” mentality who seek to create cooperative eco-communities—some of which may (in “racial” terms) be all black, some all white, some mixed; and which may vary compositionally in other respects as well.

Why, then, consider blacks as good prospects for forming a significant portion of the New Society's vanguard? Let me answer by referring to a few books. Psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs refer (in *The Jesus Bag* 187) to a “black morality” which involves, e.g., brotherhood, generosity, sensory and sensual involvement with life, humility before life, love of land, etc. James M. Jones (in *Research Directions of Black Psychologists* 188) discusses black psychology in terms of time, rhythm, improvisation, oral expression, and spirituality. And A. Wade Boykin (in *The School Achievement of Minority Children* 189) writes about blacks referring to movement, rhythm, music, verve, affect, etc.

It seems to me that these experts have identified elements of the psychology of many blacks which, if not explicitly Jesuan / “green,” are much closer to being such than being conventional. Of course, blacks vary in “consciousness,” just as members of other “races” do. But *proportionately* there may be more blacks (and Native Americans, etc.) near the Jesuan / “green” end of the “Consciousness III” continuum than whites.

At any rate, let us hope that those with a Jesuan / “green” mentality—whether black, white, or whatever—resist efforts to further divide the United States population along “racial” lines, and begin leading us to a New Society. And if “race” must still be recognized in that New Society, let us at least hope that “races” will be perceived—by all—as representing differences in *kind*, rather than differences in *level / degree*.

187. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1971, p. 177-80.

188. Edited by A. Wade Boykin, Anderson J. Franklin, and J. Frank Yates. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1979. Jones's paper is entitled “Conceptual and Strategic Issues in the Relationship of Black Psychology to American Social Science;” it appears on pp. 390-432.

189. A. W. Boykin, “The Triple Quandary and the Schooling of Afro-American Children,” in *The School Achievement of Minority Children*, edited by U. Neisser. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986, pp. 57-92.

Some Final Remarks

I began this “essay” with some rather pointed remarks made by a nameless 190 Native American, quoted by Jim Wallis—remarks critical of Christianity for its failure to take the gospels seriously (in terms of the latter’s discussions of Jesus’s teachings). The Native American in question concluded his remarks by asking, in effect, why Christians ignored Jesus’s teachings—and no one present at the conference could (per Wallis) offer an explanation. Thus, we have here the pathetic fact that Christianity pays little attention to Jesus’s teachings, on the one hand, and the additional pathetic fact that no one in a group of “experts” regarding Christianity could offer an explanation for this lack.

What I have attempted to herein, then, is offer at least a partial answer to this Native American’s question—asserting that part of the answer is the particular intellectual superstructure of this society, the *governing societal theory*. I asserted that this theory could be thought of as consisting of a layer consisting of ideas rooted in the work of Adam Smith (regarding which I discussed a “pure” version, as well as a “modified” one), this overlain with a layer having its roots in Charles Darwin’s “theory” of Natural Selection. I noted that there were discrepancies between the two bodies of theory (e.g., the “pure” version of the Smith-based theory assumes that everyone is identical, whereas social Darwinism specifically assumes that individual variation is the rule), but that basically the two theories meshed—especially in terms of their recommendations (usually tacit) as to how one should behave. I pointed out, regarding the latter, that the behavior recommended (if but tacitly) was decidedly unJesuan; and that because our governing societal theory is like the air we breathe (there, but we tend not to notice it), it is understandable why people who have grown up in America would have absorbed this theory and, therefore, been governed by it in their thinking and behavior. Whether one has been raised in a “Christian” home or not, I might add. The Native American in question may have been insufficiently acculturated (thank God!!) to perceive this.

Let me close the discussion with a few summary statements relative to the subject at hand:

- The “lower” portion of our societal theory (in its “modified” version, in particular) assumes that people are driven (by their “natures”) to acquire; that drive results in people competing with others; and the resulting competition causes people to develop aggressive personalities. Given this, people should not be expected to develop an other-orientation. Rather, they will tend to view others as rivals—even enemies—and therefore will have no tendency to do for others. Unless, perhaps, if it is for “show.”
- The “upper” portion of the societal theory uses as a tacit assumption that people are naturally selfish. Therefore, it is not “natural” for them to want to do for others—and they usually don’t. I noted that with the “pure” version of the “lower” portion of the theory people didn’t do for others, but this was because others were assumed not to need anything, *not* because people were selfish. However, with the “modified” version of that portion of the theory, one might argue that the reason they were not doing for others was that they had acquired a *habit* of not doing so. So that in neither the “pure” nor

190 He has a name, of course, but Wallis did not mention it—perhaps because he didn’t know what it was.

“modified” versions were people doing for others—but, additionally, in neither case was this because they were “naturally” selfish. However, with the “modified” version it is still true that people do not do for others—so that their behavior is *as if they were selfish*. From the perspective of those in need, it hardly matters *why* others are not doing for them! What’s decisive for them, rather, is that they need help, but are not receiving it.

- In the “modified” version of the “lower” layer of the theory there is variation in incomes, and the explanation for this is that those with low incomes are in that situation either because they are lazy or because they have developed bad habits—so that, either way, they are poor because of the *choices* they have made. Conversely, those who are rich have become rich because of their diligence and willingness to work long hours: they are rich because they have worked for it, have made choices that have resulted in their becoming rich. Given that those who are poor are to blame for their poverty, they have only themselves to blame for their poverty—so that the rich should feel no obligation to help them.
- In the “upper” (i.e., social Darwinian) portion of the theory, variation between individuals is also assumed, but in this case the basis of the variation is assumed to be heredity; that is, a *deterministic* explanation is involved in this case. In this portion of the theory, then, if one is rich, this is because one has “good” genes; if one is poor, the reason is one’s “bad” genes. And although one cannot help the fact that one has inherited “bad” genes, those who have “good” genes should feel no obligation to do for those with “bad” genes because doing so would simply add to the population of those with little capability of contributing to the society. Indeed, because such people can be thought of as “polluting” the gene pool, not only should they not be given help; they should be encouraged not to reproduce—perhaps even be sterilized, or at least helped to out-migrate. And at the extreme end of the scale they should be disposed of because of their inferiority (the Nazi solution).
- Using the term “meritocracy” for our society (the “modified” version of the “lower” portion of the theory) suggests that no attempt should be made to change the society—because it is in no need of fixing. Therefore, no government programs are needed to help those in need, because things are “fine and dandy” as they are—at least in the sense that everyone is receiving on the basis of desert.
- The “pure” version of the “lower” portion of the theory asserts that government can only “interfere” in the society’s workings. Therefore, government programs to help those in need should be eschewed because they will only serve to “mess up” the economy.

Factors in addition to our society’s intellectual superstructure likely also would help answer our Native American’s question, as well as components of our intellectual superstructure *in addition* to the governing societal theory. My considered opinion, however, is that this latter theory is of especial importance in explaining why our country is not a Jesuan one. So that “exposing” this theory can perhaps help people come to the realization that they are victims of “thought control,” which realization can lead to their reducing the influence of the theory on their thoughts and actions. That is my hope, at any rate.

Conceiving the Good Society: A NeWFian Perspective

James B. Gray

The NeWFian (see my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” on this web site) receives especial inspiration from Matthew 25 (the feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc., portion), but at the same time recognizes that there is a major problem associated with that passage: it refers to a societal situation which, from a long-run perspective, is by no means a healthy one. For it is a societal situation within which some (seemingly) are perpetually dependent on others (which is not good for their self-esteem), while others are perpetually “ministering” (and thereby living too much for others, and not enough for themselves).

It is, of course, understandable why Jesus would have promoted such a “philosophy”: (1) Many in his society *were* needy, some in the society had the means to provide for the needs of such people, and the Scripture of his society demanded (in its unadulterated form, that is) that these latter do their duty; (2) the fact of Roman occupation meant that it was necessary to take the existing societal situation as a “given.” That is, although some of the prophetic writings in Hebrew Scripture made brief reference to the Good Society, Jesus did not have the luxury of doing so because of Roman rule. True, Jesus made frequent reference to the “Kingdom of God”—and thereby seemingly was alluding to a different sort of society. Those references, however, are best interpreted as referring not to a society with a different *institutional* situation but, rather, to a society within which it was “merely” the case that “haves” felt a responsibility for “have nots”—and acted on that feeling.

We moderns, however, are not so handicapped. Indeed, an important part of the literary production that has occurred in the Western World over the past two millennia or so has been works that have either presented “pictures” of the Good Society (often in the form of “utopian” novels—such as the one written by Thomas More), and thereby offered implicit critiques of the Existing Order; or, on the other hand, works that have concentrated on simply explicitly critiquing the Existing Order (e.g., Karl Marx’s critique of capitalism in *Das Kapital*), without also offering a picture of the author’s concept of the Good Society.

The former approach is of especial value, in my opinion. Not because it provides any *instruction* regarding “how to get from here to there” but, rather, because in providing an image of where we should be (in the author’s view), it provides some sort of benchmark for *evaluating* proposals on how to get there. That is, although the *end* does not, in itself, suggest *means* that would be appropriate and effective for achieving the end (except that the means must, of course, be *consistent* with the end—so that only non-violent means are acceptable), by *having* an end clearly in mind, one is in a position to judge the adequacy and appropriateness of any means that are recommended. This despite the fact that one would not expect that the end would be *fully* realizable: that would be simply too much to ask for, any rational person knows.

With these principles in mind, I offer comments below on the Good Society from a NeWFian perspective. Not the *only* possible such perspective, of course—for NeWFism is not a rigid thought system. Rather, the perspective offered here is merely *my own*—and as it is *today*: I reserve the right to change my recommendations as I encounter new facts and discover flaws in my reasoning.

My first point is that what's "good" about the Good Society¹⁹¹ is that a high-level of well-being is characteristic of most of its inhabitants. This is, true, a "humanistic" principle, but it does not follow from that fact that this Good Society would follow all of the principles of Humanism as that philosophy is commonly presented today. Most notably, the agnosticism/atheism of contemporary Humanism—reflecting its extreme philosophical materialism and naturalism—is no part of NeWFism, and therefore no part of the Good Society envisioned here.

Given the Good Society's valuing of well-being for all, one might also call it a *sane* society, per Erich Fromm; or, call it the Ideal Society, etc. But whatever label is applied to it, its valuing of human well-being does not mean that ill-being is absent from the society: there is some sickness, there are some accidents, there is death, etc.—so that any given inhabitant of the Good Society likely experiences periods of ill-being during his/her life. But when one is having problems, one finds, in the Good Society, that others are concerned about that fact; one finds support and comfort from others when one is having problems. So that even though one can expect to experience ill-being at times in the Good Society (and individuals will, of course, vary in how much of the time they experience significant ill-being), during those times one's ill-being is minimized because of the sympathy expressed (concretely) toward oneself by other members of the society. I should add that the inhabitants of the Good Society are not only engaged in actions that contribute to the immediate well-being of their fellows, but will (they hope) contribute to the well-being of *future* inhabitants (down to the "seventh generation," as Native Americans would put it).

The basic "building block" of the Good Society (as I conceive it) is the small community—leaving "small" undefined here. I conceive most of these as being *cooperative* communities, but some might very well be company towns (but rather unlike the notorious company towns of the past!). But whether small cooperative communities or company towns, a basic principle to use in their creation would be to create them with ecological considerations in mind—e.g., to build

191 I see human well-being primarily in terms of human "design specifications" (a term used by George Edgin Pugh, in his *The Biological Basis of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977)—which specifications can be thought of as having developed in humans prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago. *The Paleolithic Prescription* by Melvin Konner *et al.* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988) is one example of a work that deals with this topic rather well, but primarily from a dietary standpoint. I would also bring in here Abraham Maslow's concept of a hierarchy of needs—a concept that can, though, be misused, in that it can be used to argue that (virtually) *everyone* has an adequate level of well-being, the only difference between people being that some are oriented to "higher-order" needs, some "lower-order" ones. In a sense, the Maslowan theory is a *conservative* one in that it can be used to excuse not doing for those in need; it can be used to keep the society a strongly *inegalitarian* one. Maslow's writings do not evince a sociological sensitivity, thus I am not surprised that Maslow himself apparently did not see this deficiency in his theory. For a discussion of Maslow's theory (among others) go, e.g., to <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html>.

I feel it necessary to add that as we attempt to be "scientific" in making comments about humans we tend to assume, if but implicitly, that human behavior must be viewed only in deterministic terms. This misses a very important feature of humans, namely that they have some ability to make choices (see, e.g., *Man the Choicemaker*, Elizabeth Boyden Howes and Sheila Moon, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1973). It is important that people be given the ability to make choices, so that they can *feel* that they make choices, which choices have observable results

them so as to minimize their “contribution” of greenhouse gases (and thereby and thereby that array of effects associated with “global warming”).

The former, however, would be the most common, and would be established as *corporations*. A given community would be owned by a corporation;¹⁹² a given corporation would own but one community (i.e., the community's *real* property—its land and structures). The corporation, in turn, would be owned by shareholders. Ideally, the owners of a given corporation would all reside in the corporation's community; but as some move from a community, they may retain their share(s) in the community being exited. Only residents with shares would have the right to vote during corporation meetings; however, a given shareholder would have but one vote, regardless of number of shares owned. This reflects the fact that in the Good Society the prevailing view is that *all* individuals are important. Individuals would be perceived as varying in characteristics, but this variation would be perceived in *qualitative*, rather than *quantitative*, terms: differences in *kind* would be recognized, rather than differences in *degree*—meaning that not only would the *concepts* of superiority/inferiority not be present in the minds of inhabitants, but also that *feelings* of superiority/inferiority would not exist (these latter feelings being among the most toxic ones that poison existing society).

In the Good Society an egalitarian attitude would prevail, and the society would have *institutions* (not specified here in detail) designed to promote such an attitude. The small size of a community would itself contribute to such an attitude, but not necessarily: it would facilitate the development of such an attitude, but by no means would guarantee it. In addition, the society would, e.g., encourage the use of cooperative games by children (and virtually outlaw competitive sports). It would also use the New Word Fellowship¹⁹³—which by its very nature is non-denominational—as its basic religious institution.¹⁹⁴ The governance of the community would be not only democratic in name, but democratic in practice (with the proviso stated above).

Any given community would have enough land that the inhabitants' food needs (at least) could be basically met via agricultural activities (both crop—and livestock—raising). This does not mean that a community would try to be entirely self-sufficient in food production, but *does* mean that it would try to be as self-sufficient as possible—specifically being able to be *totally* self-sufficient, should this become necessary. Some communities might have enough land that gathering of wild foods would be enabled, along with the hunting of game animals.

192 A company town, in contrast, would be owned by an individual—corporate ownership being prohibited in this case. The reason my Good Society allows for this alternate sort of community is that I recognize that life in a cooperative community would not be appealing to all, so that the company town is an acceptable alternative for the society. This would attract, on the one hand, people with entrepreneurial ability who also have a need to be individualistic; and, on the other hand, those who prefer the status of employees—thereby having limited responsibilities.

193 See my “Worship . . .” cited earlier.

194 However, this institution would be encouraged rather than required. Those who wished to attend religious meetings other than—or in addition to—ones associated with NeWFism would be at liberty to establish such meetings.

Communities would, however, vary in how large they were (in population size), how much land they owned, what sorts of foods they “produced,” etc.

An implication of the facts of (1) small communities as basic building blocks and (2) these communities being largely self-sufficient in food needs is that the Good Society would have an economy very different from what prevails currently in the United States. Much less (in variety and quantity) would be produced, in large part because the inhabitants would not have an acquisitive motivation—nor be “possessed” with the notions that they must have whatever is new, large, and sophisticated. On the one hand, a society of small communities is hindered by its very nature from producing a great variety (and great quantity) of goods-services; on the other hand, however, given that the inhabitants of the Good Society would not have a materialistic motivational orientation, they would find that a society of small communities is “natural” for them (i.e., it “fits” them, i.e., their “design specifications”)—and is perfectly capable of producing much of what they want produced. Insofar as there would be interaction between communities (especially in the trading of goods), it is obvious that there would need to be some specialists engaged in doing the requisite activities; and it is obvious that this would require (at least) a transportation infrastructure of some sort. This implies that some members of the society, because of the activities they engage in, would not be tied to specific communities (except residually—although some might choose to live as “isolates”); that fact, however, does not mean that the small community would not be the basic unit of the society.

I should add that I expect a society of communities to have governments at various levels (a national government, and various regional governments, the latter being meaningful from an ecological standpoint—see Kirkpatrick Sales's *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* 195); each community, of course, would be self-governing. As I stated above, affairs of a given community would be handled by shareholders in the relevant corporation (each having one, and only one, vote). For any regional government and the national government there would be a unicameral legislature (ideally 196), an executive branch, and a judicial branch—the first having the dominant power, with its members chosen with the use some sort of proportional representation system (such as a “list” system). While individuals are occupying positions in government, they would not necessarily reside in one of the basic sorts of community; and the fact that they would need to be supported by the society implies that the basic communities would need to pay some sort of tax for the support of governmental functions. (Which, in turn, implies that the society would need some sort of monetary system, 197 with specialists

195 Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000. Were regional governments established, this would mean, in effect, that the existing set of states would be abolished and replaced by a new set—one based on bioregional principles. In practice, of course, this would not be expected to occur; but what is conceivable is that states in the same (or roughly the same) bioregion would form at least loose confederations, based on certain common interests.

196 This would not be possible at the national level, of course, because the U. S. Constitution species a House of Representatives and Senate at the national level—and changing this structure would be very difficult to bring about. At the state level, however, it might be somewhat easier to institute this change. At present, only one state—Nebraska—has a unicameral legislature.

197 Given that I am assuming that the Good Society would be created *within* the existing societal system of the U. S., there would, of course, be no need to *create* a monetary system for the Good Society. Rather, the existing monetary system would continue in existence, but be forced to modify itself as the

responsible for producing and controlling that system—these individuals also being supported by taxes.) The need (on a per capita basis) for government bureaucrats would, of course, be much less in the Good Society than in the current one (and there would not be the waste and corruption associated currently with our governments).

Insofar as the society would have company towns, I would expect them to be larger in population size than the cooperative communities, for such units likely would require a larger labor force for producing whatever it was that they produced (goods in particular, but even certain services). Such units might be single-owner proprietorships or partnerships, but would not be allowed to have the corporate form—the rationale being that large firms can not only be oppressive to their employees and the communities that house them, but are very disruptive when they fail, leaving their former employees abandoned. The company towns that I envision would not be able to exploit their workers by virtue of the fact that within the society it would be easy for one to move from a company town to either another such settlement, or to a cooperative community. Indeed, I assume that the Good Society would have newspapers (ones that, being less dependent on advertisements than current ones are, would be less propagandistic in nature), and that communities (of both type) could advertise in them if they had a need for additional personnel. Therefore, if a person in a particular community felt dissatisfied with his/her life in that community, s/he could look in such newspapers to see what alternate opportunities might exist "out there."

Given a de-emphasis on consumption in the Good Society, not only would the economy be much smaller (in terms of quantities produced and variety) than what we find currently in the United States. The nature of work would be very different. In the production of basics for a given cooperative community, everyone able to be involved would be—the work tasks being rotated on some basis agreeable to the community's residents. This would enable everyone to get some physical exercise, and to spend some time outdoors—contributing not only to physical health, but mental well-being. Such work would not require much of one's time (during, e.g., a month); there might be some seasonality involved here, though, as there might be more to do during some seasons than others. Besides one's basic work there might be specialized work (although this would not necessarily be true for everyone). And there would be much more free time than is characteristic of our harried society. Much of that free time likely would be spent socializing with one's fellow community residents—but this would be a matter of choice, and efforts would be made to avoid imposing conformity of behavior on community residents.

A point that may not be self-evident regarding the economy that I am describing is that it would be a "free market"—or "free enterprise"—one (if I may use those basically vacuous terms¹⁹⁸).

Good Society grew in mass. That is, elements of the existing monetary system that were "fit" for the Good Society would survive and continue, while those elements not appropriate for the Good Society would wither away and die.

198 The terms refer to an abstract "right" that people in the society supposedly have, regarding economic activities, rather than to readily observable characteristics. As such, the terms serve an *ideological*, rather than *descriptive*, function—diverting attention from the real nature of the economy (e.g., the fact that some of its primary characteristics are that it is dominated by large corporations and that most participants in the economy are in a dependency status—as wage/salary earners).

Government would place certain restrictions on what can occur in the economy, but no more than what exists currently. Indeed, although our national government currently is basically under control of large corporations—despite what the Constitution might say, or what Economics professors may preach—such would not be the case in the Good Society: lacking large corporations, such domination would not be possible.

Perhaps because I am a male, I am especially interested in the nature of work in the Good Society, and would say that what's primarily needed in this realm is to avoid the problems associated with work in the existing society, some of which I will identify here: (1) One is usually forced to work on a rather rigid schedule, as if one were a machine; i.e., one must begin and end work every (work) day at the same time, usually needing to put in a 40-hour week. (2) Often one finds oneself working at a job that does not fit one's abilities well (roughly 85% of all employees!—I recall from my reading of *What Color is Your Parachute* several years ago). (3) Related to this, those who would like work that challenges them, and enables them to grow in their abilities, often cannot find such jobs. (4) Usually one has little voice regarding how one does one's job; and if one gets ideas concerning how one might expand one's duties in various directions, one may find it very difficult to get the approval so to do. (5) The "output" of the organization one works for may be objectionable (e.g., a company that creates advertisements, a company that produces war materiel, a company that produces chemicals [most of which are inherently polluting], etc.), so that one is forced to prostitute oneself in working for the organization; if one could find alternate employment, this would not be the case, but often such employment is not at hand. (6) Even though the "output" of an organization may not be objectionable, the production process itself may be—because it involves danger, is polluting, etc.. (7) Some may have the complaint of not having sufficient vacation time; or not being able to take off when they would like. (8) Some believe that they are insufficiently compensated for what they do. (9) Many believe that they receive too little praise for their good work: they receive criticism when they "screw up," but not praise when they do well. (10) Some resent the fact that they are evaluated by a supervisor (this being merely subjective, with no scientific basis, but treated as "gospel"¹⁹⁹), but are not, in turn, given the opportunity to evaluate their supervisor. (11) For some the work environment is unpleasant, even unhealthy. (12) Etc.

How to solve such problems? Easy—just *decide* that they should not occur, and *act* in such a manner that they don't! There's no great mystery involved here!

A basic shared attitude (and one fostered by the society via explicit teaching as well as experience with various institutions) desired for the Good Society would be the recognition that each member of the society had unique natural gifts, and that it would be desirable for each to develop those abilities. Not for personal advantage, however, but for the purpose of contributing to the welfare of others in the community—and society at large. Also, in the Good Society there would be the shared attitude that one should strive not only to develop one's own abilities, but be sensitive to others, and work to help others identify and develop *their* abilities. The rationale for this would be recognition that it is to *one's own* advantage to do what can to help others develop,

¹⁹⁹ What makes this practice particularly ironic with "high-tech" firms is that their "output" involves the use of a high level of scientific/technological knowledge, yet the evaluation of employees involves the mere subjective opinion of a single supervisor.

for one may very well oneself be the beneficiary of “help” (thought of in broad terms²⁰⁰) from others.

Keep in mind that I assume that much, if not most, of this “helping” activity that people engage in occurs during their “free” time; they are engaging in activities (e.g., playing in an orchestra) not for livelihood, but for personal enjoyment—and perhaps even out of a sense of duty. Given this, they are “working” on a *gratis* basis, so that the recipient of their “services” (again, defined broadly, so that it *could* encompass giving *things* away, such as pieces of furniture one has made) is not expected to pay for those services. (Which implies that there would be only limited use for money in the Good Society: mainly for acquiring goods in the “basic” category, such as bananas that must be brought in from some distant location.)

People in the Good Society would realize that their own well-being is dependent but slightly on the consumption of goods. They would recognize that they need nutritious food and potable water, shelter, furniture and certain appliances in those shelters, clothing, etc.—for their survival, and some degree of comfort. They would also realize, however, that beyond the basics there is little they actually need in the way of things. They would realize that satisfaction basically comes from establishing and maintaining good relationships with others, working harmoniously with others, conversing with others, recreating with others, etc. Also, from developing abilities (or expertise), and using them in the service of others (whether or not recipients express gratitude for what one does for them).

Traveling would be another source of pleasure in the Good Society, but would be very unlike much of the traveling done today. Today, people go to, e.g., Cancun to relax, swim, see sights, etc.—and keep their distance from the “locals.” In the Good Society people would continue to travel to see natural and historical sights, but would mainly travel to meet new people (especially ones with different cultural backgrounds) and interact with them.

Members of the Good Society would not be isolationists in the sense of not wanting to know what was going on in the outside world—either in terms of events (such as the fighting associated with our illegal—and immoral—war in Iraq), or intellectual developments. Each community would offer schooling to its children; and learning establishments would exist for higher levels of education. Although the education offered would not be parochial (as it seems to be in Amish communities, and many Islamic societies), neither would it simply ape what exists currently in the United States or other (allegedly) “advanced” societies²⁰¹. Members of the Good Society would work out a philosophy of what they thought their people should know, and would especially emphasize not knowledge *per se*, but the ability to *think* critically/creatively, to relate well with others, and to communicate well. Educational institutions would need to be supported via taxation of the communities (and other entities); they would be outside in system in the sense that they would not (necessarily) be associated with the basic communities.

²⁰⁰ For example, I benefit from the fact that Jean Sibelius developed his talent for composing music.

²⁰¹ There is little that qualifies as “advanced” in the so-called “health care” system in the United States! Reflected in the fact that currently the United States ranks No. 12 on the “Human Development Index.” For information on the index see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index

Neither would members of these communities be isolationist in the sense of not wanting to do for people in other societies. Just as the Mennonites frequently travel to various places in the world where disasters have occurred, and missionary activity (e.g., by Methodists) is increasing being perceived as involving *acting* like a Christian rather than trying to convert others to a belief system, so would members of the Good Society be interested in events in other parts of the world, and be willing to lend their support to others as needed—and as their resources permitted.

I should note that an important reason members of the Good Society would have well-being is that they would automatically have *security*. One would be born into a given community, and would automatically become a part of that community. Once one came of age one would have an opportunity to become a shareholder in the community's corporation, but one would not need to. Not becoming a shareholder would prevent one from voting in corporation affairs, but one's "citizenship" in the community would not require one becoming a shareholder. Indeed, one would be a "citizen" until one moved from the community, or died. And as a community member, one would be able to have one's basic needs met. It would be assumed that one would be a productive member of the community if at all possible; but it would be recognized that some are less able to contribute than others—and that *everyone* reaches an age where they no longer can contribute. Members of the community, however, would feel an obligation toward *all* members of the community. Some communities might be especially burdened, and require some assistance from the regional or national government; most communities, however, most of the time, would be able to guarantee security to all members.²⁰² If some individuals show a proclivity to be "slackers," there should be enough peer pressure within the community to convince people that they have an obligation to do what they can to contribute to the community.

We should not forget that an important source of well-being for adults is sexual activity—usually with members of the opposite sex, but not for homosexuals (who would not be regarded as "queer" in the Good Society). An active sex life is, for most people, a factor that contributes to both physical and mental health, so that to restrict sexual activity to reproduction is not only unnatural, but dangerous to well-being as well. I assume that this generalization applies both to heterosexuals and homosexuals. It goes without saying, of course, that the need for sexual activity (in terms of frequency) is a matter that varies from individual to individual; and for a given individual varies from time to time (e.g., with age).

Marriage in the existing society has the problem that it requires that each member of the partnership regard the other as one's *exclusive* property: when one says "This is my wife," in effect one says "This is my property."²⁰³ Thus, if one is married and has sex outside of

202 In the existing society one suspects that in addition to (or is it instead of?!) the official explanations for unemployment, another reason is a desire, on the part of the elite, to keep wage/salary rates as low as feasible. Also, insofar as there is a trade-off between full employment and inflation, the elite can be expected to opt for the latter rather than the former—for, e.g., what good does it to hold tax-free bonds if inflation eats away at the bonds' earnings?!

203 Note that use of the word "cheating" here betrays this sort of perception (i.e., that of spouses as property). Of course, historically wives *were* property. Some scholars have argued, in fact, in centuries past conquerors would bring women back home to become "wives"—wives who happened also to be property; and that marriage has its origins in this practice. If this explanation has merit, it would explain why modern marriage is still imbued with the concepts of ownership and property.

marriage, this is usually (but not always) perceived as hurtful (betrayal) by the partner, and as wrong by others. In fact, we have the term “adultery” for such behavior, a term that has strong negative connotations associated with it.

The problem here, though, is not so much to “errant” sexual *behavior*, but our *attitudes*. It should be recognized that people vary in their desire for sexual activity²⁰⁴ (frequency), and desire for variety in partners—but that the existing institution of marriage does not conform with those varying desires. Although “theoretically” partners will confine their sexual activity with the other partner, and both partners will want to engage in sexual activity with the same frequency, the reality is different. Some partners have a desire to “stray,” to engage in sex with others outside the partnership. On the other hand, even if neither partner has a desire to stray, one partner may desire sex more frequently than the other. In other words, marriage as currently understood is very rigid in the expectations it places on people. Because of this, and because people have varying needs and expectations, straying is fairly commonplace—as people respond to their biological needs, rather than social expectations. And this is a major reason for the high divorce rate in our society.

What's needed is attitudes and expectations more in accord with the varying needs of real people. On the other hand, however, consideration must be given to how children are raised. The sexual practices that are condoned must not be such that children are placed in jeopardy, so far as the provision of security in their raising is concerned. Perhaps the best answer is to maintain marriage, but to also promote an expectation that a community has a responsibility for raising the community's children, not just the children's parents. Also, attitudes toward “straying” perhaps need to be changed, so that if it occurs, it does not devastate marriages: because it is accepted as “normal” by all adults, they are not bothered by it if it does occur in their marriage. Indeed, perhaps it should not merely be not frowned upon, but actually encouraged—for the sake of strengthening marriages. Perhaps also “houses of ill repute” should be accepted as necessary (as they are some places, including, evidently, the state of Nevada) to stabilize marriages where there is great variation in the desire for sex.²⁰⁵ What must be emphasized is that certain acts are not *inherently* terrible, disruptive of marriages; attitudes toward those acts are what motivate behavior, and those attitudes are subject to modification. What's desirable to modify them in the direction of the requirements of what's biologically desirable.

In the Good Society marriages would still occur, but the expectations of those entering into marriage would be different from those common in existing society. Indeed, one might argue

204 Christopher Lasch has stated (in his *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1979) that the obsession that many in our society have with sex is based not so much in their biology as our societal situation: we live in a society wherein many of our social and other needs are not met well, and we respond (“compensate”) for this by engaging in various substitutionary activities—including “excessive” sexual activity, on the part of some.

205 In certain ancient societies (I can't name one off hand) there was such a thing as temple prostitution (although the term “prostitution” would seem to be *our* term, and one conveying *our* attitude toward the practice). I am not aware of any studies which have examined this practice from the standpoint of how functional it was, how well it “worked.” It would, however, be of value to know more about that practice.

that marriage would be strengthened in the Good Society by virtue of the fact that the Good Society's basic institution would be the cooperative community, *not* the family. In addition, it is worth mentioning that philosopher John Rawls²⁰⁶ argued, in the early 1970s, that so far as the goal of *justice* is concerned, the family institution presents a potential obstacle in its realization. The Good Society, because the family would play a different role in it, should have this problem to a much lesser degree—if at all.

The Good Society likely would be a rather stable society, with the only (or at least main) source of instability being technological advance. On the one hand I assume that members of the society would be attempting to develop “appropriate” technology for their society (one important area being the development of energy sources). Certainly the history of the Shaker movement demonstrates that “intentional” communities *can* be very active so far as technological development is concerned, perhaps can even form a vanguard. On the other hand, however, it will remain a fact that technological development will occur out there in “the world” (by “gentiles”), and there is the question of how the Good Society should react to such development. I would say that its members should adopt an Amish-like attitude, and decide to accept (or not) new technology based on its likely impact on the society: will it contribute to the well-being of the society's population, or won't it?²⁰⁷ One cannot, of course, fully predict the implications of a new technology, but at least the Amish refuse simply to mindlessly adopt a new technology simply because it's new. Thus, residents of the Good Society should keep abreast of technological (and scientific, etc.) developments occurring in “the world,” but should adopt new technology only after careful thought and thorough discussion.

I'm sure that there are other questions that should be addressed regarding the nature of the Good Society (e.g., how does it defend itself against aggressors? what would be the nature of entertainment in the Good Society? the nature of the arts?) . . . but why do *I* have to have all the answers?!

206 *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971. For a brief discussion of Rawls see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Theory_of_Justice .

207 See, e.g., Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the*

Industrial Revolution (New York: Basic Books, 1996). I have not read Christopher Lasch's *True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1991), but suspect that it may have something to say about this issue. Certainly many in our society are “possessed” by the idea that well-being comes from consuming goods; and the related idea that it's good that ever-more goods come on the market. What this underscores is that so much of our technological development goes toward the development of new consumer products, the motivation for such development being the conviction so many hold that they need ever-more things to keep happy. So many have the notion that there is no such thing as satiety; they can only remain happy if they are presented with ever-more new things; thus, they can't wait until the next “model year” comes along. What's notable about this conviction is that it is true for people only because they believe it's true. Being bombarded by commercials it's easy to understand why people think this way. However, if people were at all reflective, they would realize that they have been duped: the emperor is naked!

As to the question of how to bring the Good Society into being, an important part of the answer to this question is simply: Start creating small cooperative communities, and work for their proliferation (while also giving some encouragement to the creation of small company towns). In addition, however, I would “hold up” the New Word Fellowship (see my “Worship . . .” cited earlier) as a vehicle for generating ideas regarding any number of subjects—but including, most certainly, how to go about acquiring land for cooperative communities, including how much land to acquire for a given community; what structures to build on them, using what materials; what types of “export” activities to create for them; what population size to “shoot” for; etc. In addition, of course, the New Word Fellowship can provide a setting within which the questions raised in the previous paragraph—along with many others—can not only be addressed, but provided with answers. In the process of “operating” such Fellowships a great variety of consequences are likely to occur—including the acquisition of new concepts of what it means to be religious. And what could possibly be wrong with that?!

“Where’s the Love?” (for Jesus)

James B. Gray

There’s an old Christian hymn that contains the words:

Oh! How I love Jesus!
Because he first loved me.

For which I would provide the following translation:

“I love you, Jesus, and show my love for you by singing praises to you. But you should know that the only reason I love you, is that you came down to earth and died a sacrificial death on a cross to atone for my sins. Had you not done that for me, I would have no reason to love you—and wouldn’t.”

To which Jesus might very well reply:

“Thanks a lot! Maybe your church has taught you that I came down to earth to atone for your sins, but if that’s the case, your church has got it all wrong! In the first place, I didn’t ‘come down’ from Heaven; I was born to a woman, just like you—and that woman was not a virgin! *That* claim has its basis in pagan Mystery religion stories—commonly called ‘myths’—that early Christian ‘intellectuals’ used as the basis for creating their theology. In the second place, I didn’t *want* to die on a cross, it just happened. I had not *planned* to die a sacrificial death—whether to atone for sins or whatever. Rather, circumstances existing at the time meant that conducting a public ministry, as I did, likely would offend not only the Roman authorities, but my own religious leaders as well. That happened—and you know *what* that led to, although you are absolutely wrong on the *why* part.

“It pains me to no end that you can’t see, from your reading of the gospels, that what I was ‘about’ was doing what I could to contribute to the well-being of those in my society who were suffering for various reasons. I was able to help some directly by using my healing powers, and I also tried to help the suffering indirectly through my teaching—in which I urged the ‘haves’ of my society to (Matthew 25) give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, etc. In fact, I made it clear that this was my one and only plan for salvation. You claim to love me, but then go on to state that this love is conditional on my first loving you. But not only is your supposed love self-centered; it’s based on a claim which is patent nonsense, given that I don’t even know you. Have you forgotten that I died 2,000 years ago? Oh that’s right; you believe that I was resurrected from the dead, don’t you? Boy, are you credulous!

“If you were sincere in your claim that you loved me, you would pay heed to my *teachings*. As it is, you disgust me—get out of my sight!”

And that’s the story of Christianity, in a nutshell. Rather than Christians paying heed to the teachings of Jesus, they have done seemingly everything they can to *ignore* those teachings—in favor of making beliefs, rituals, etc. the heart of Christianity. This has, however, not been *just* a matter of choice; it is not necessarily the case that the Christian shunning of Jesus’s teachings has been a *conscious* choice—and that fact can be regarded as “good news.” What do I mean in stating that Christians’ turning away from Jesus’s teachings has not *just* been a matter of conscious choice? I mean that a number of factors operate—and have been operating—in our

society that work to *inhibit* Christians from paying heed to Jesus's teachings. What I would like to do in this essay, then, is to elaborate on this point. In doing so I do not, however, attempt to provide a *complete* explanation of why Christians ignore Jesus's teachings but, rather, focus on just one part of that explanation: "Forces" that operate in our society that help explain why Jesus's teachings are given short shrift—in the process often giving people "excuses" for their unJesuan behavior.

The "forces"—or factors—to which I am referring have in common that they operate without most people being aware of their existence. And that's precisely why they are able to operate effectively. If people *were* aware of these forces, there is hope that those forces would lose their effectiveness. My goal here, then, is not merely to inform, to educate. Rather, it is to inform so that the reader will become aware of the possibility that his or her thinking processes are being guided, unawares, by an "intellectual atmosphere" that is being breathed in, and influencing one's thoughts, and therefore behaviors—affecting the latter in a manner that inhibits them from taking Jesus's teachings seriously. This "intellectual atmosphere" can be thought of as comprised of what might be termed *ideologies* or *theories*, and my purpose here is to identify and describe several of them here. The role of these ideologies/theories is to underlie the thought processes of people in this society—and thereby provide believable/acceptable excuses to people for failing to heed Jesus's teachings (while often using *other* portions of the Bible for authorization—i.e., *excuse!*—purposes).

It will be useful to begin the presentation here with the observation that the New Testament reports that a teacher of the Law approached Jesus one day, and asked Jesus to name the greatest of the commandments. Jesus reportedly responded by stating that the greatest commandment was to love God (with all of one's heart, soul, and mind) and that, likewise, one was to love one's neighbor as oneself.²⁰⁸ This can be "translated" to say: "Love God *by loving the neighbor.*" Indeed, earlier in *Matthew* (7:12) Jesus is quoted (the "Golden Rule") as recommending that one should do onto others as one would like others to do for oneself; and then goes on to declare that this is *the* meaning of the Law of Moses and of the teachings of the prophets.

Whether or not the two laws identified by Jesus can actually be "boiled down" into one (*I* have no doubt regarding this),²⁰⁹ my focus here is just on the second of the two commands—the love-the-neighbor one (which, stated differently, becomes: "Yes, I *am* my brother's keeper"). And the first point that I would like to make regarding this command is that it is not particularly meaningful as it stands: it is a command that cries out to be "concretized," i.e., given a specific meaning (meanings, actually). So that *if* someone wishes to follow the command, that person must first "operationalize" the command; must, that is, give it a *specific* meaning—one that makes sense for the person in question, for that particular moment. *Doing* so is not, of course, an easy matter—especially if one is in a situation where one is required to *react* to the situation,

208. See, e.g., *Matthew* 22:37-38. The first commandment has its origins in *Deuteronomy* 6:5, the second in *Leviticus* 19:18.

209. Clerics are likely to resist this, for they tend to have more of an addiction to God-talk than do normal people.

and must therefore make a quick decision. But even if one is planning, during one's leisure, what one can and should do to implement the love-the-neighbor command, one will encounter difficulties deciding precisely what that can and should entail (for oneself).²¹⁰

Second, however, there is the discouraging fact that throughout Christian history there have been numerous "Christians" who have evaded (what I deem to be) the central command offered by Jesus (the central command of the *Bible*, in fact). Why has this been the case? Before addressing that question let me call to mind, regarding the Pentateuch,²¹¹ that it implied that if there were poor (or other needy people) in the society, the reason for this is that the society's "haves" have not sufficiently addressed that poverty; they have not removed (using direct and indirect means, as specified by the Law) the neediness associated with being poor. Thus, the criticism that the Bible would direct relative to the existence of poverty would be one directed at the society's "haves." I point out this important fact because so often in our society a "blame the victim" attitude is adopted whereby the poor (and other needy) are blamed for their poverty; so that the "love of neighbor" directive of the Bible is ignored, supposedly for good reasons.

There are, however, a variety of excuses (or "dodges") that Christians and others use—consciously and otherwise—to explain why they fail to live by the love command, and in the discussion below I identify and discuss what I perceive as major ones. First, however, let me note that a major *underlying* factor that should be noted is the fact that societies can be conceived as *systems*. Now if one views societies as *systems*, and examines contemporary Western societies, one will quickly conclude that in all of those societies the Economy component is the dominant one. And *that* fact implies (given the nature of systems *per se*) that all other components of a society are subservient to the Economy (rather than having independence). What "subservience" here means, of course, is that all other components of the Societal System serve the needs of the Economy—whether or not their members admit to that fact.²¹²

This conclusion applies to the Religion component of a society just as it does to the other components, of course. Which fact has significance in the present case because it implies that our religious institutions are "required" to not challenge, seriously, our society's value system—

210 An additional problem here being that an action *intended* as one conforming to the love command may not be so interpreted by the recipient of the action. For example, the action may be perceived by the latter as insulting. We vary in how well we are able to "put ourselves into the moccasins" of another person; as a consequence, some of us are more prone to error in this regard than others. The rich in our society, having isolated themselves from our society's needy, would be therefore expected to have little empathy for the needy. Given this, it would be advisable for most of those in this category who want to help the needy simply to give money to charitable organizations. Unfortunately, the rich of our society tend to *be* rich precisely because they are greedy and selfish, and to give relatively little, relative to their ability to give. Yet we admire such people! What other species has admiration for its parasites and predators?!

211 Refer to my discussion in "Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning" on this web site.

212 "Serve the needs" is often a euphemism for "act as a prostitute." Indeed, one might very well argue that the dominant occupation in our society is prostitution—given that so many in our society use their minds to serve the interests of the Existing Order and its elite.

with its “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness. Therefore they don’t! A few institutional leaders may, but the vast majority do not. And insofar as the churches *do* challenge the dominant value system, they tend to do so in such abstruse terms that congregants have no idea how to “operationalize” the directives that they are given. Biblical values are not absent from our intellectual life. But on the one hand we tend to keep them safely imprisoned in that “temporal corral” that we call Sunday; and insofar as they are allowed expression on that day, the tendency is for expression to be expressed in a useless (for congregants) manner. In part, of course, this reflects the lack of a proper education—to say nothing of a lack of intelligence—on the part of ministers/priests. More fundamentally, however, the vacuous nature of sermonizing in our society reflects the System’s *need* for a lack of serious challenge of the value system that “energizes” the System.

Which brings up the question: Is it, then, *possible* to somehow escape the clutches of the System? Let us hope so, or we humans are surely doomed!

However, if we humans are to have any chance of being “saved” it seems to me that we first need to escape the intellectual “box” within which most of us live, and recognize that our salvation lies not in working to “reform” the Existing Order, but to create a *new* society within the old—by, for example, working to create relatively small cooperative communities²¹³ as “building blocks” of a new society (looking to, e.g., the Amish for inspiration). And, I would add, create New Word Fellowships²¹⁴—in part to act as vehicles for bringing about societal system change.

Still, there will obstacles to bringing about societal system change; the ones that I would like to focus on in this essay, however, are *intellectual* ones—because I believe them to be of particular importance.²¹⁵ The obstacles discussed below, then, have in common that they are all

213. During the nineteenth century especially the communitarian movement was an important part of U. S. History. See, e.g., Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopia: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 - 1975*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1976; and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

214 See my “Worship . . .” paper cited earlier.

215 Erich Fromm, in his “Roads to Sanity”@ chapter (Chapter 8), asked: “What society corresponds to . . . [the] aim of mental health, and what would be the structure of a sane society? First of all, a society in which no man [or woman] is a means toward another’s ends, but always and without exception an end in himself [or herself]; hence, where nobody is used, nor uses himself [or herself], for purposes which are not those of the unfolding of his own human powers; where man is [humans are] the center, and where all economic and political activities are subordinated to the aim of his [or her] growth.”@ (*The Sane Society*. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1995, p. 276.) These are fine sentiments, but also highly naive ones—as one would expect from someone who has done little if any empirical research, and therefore is little aware of the problems involved in operationalizing concepts. What Fromm seems not to grasp is that although few would disagree with the principle that people should not “use”@ other people, it is not a simple matter to prove that Person X is “using”@ Person Y. Indeed, the society within which one lives may make it easy for one to “use”@ others without even realizing it—and therefore, in good conscience.

intellectual obstacles to people in our society following the love command—a command central to both Old and New Testaments. Before beginning that discussion, however, it is essential that I make at least a brief attempt to clarify the meaning of “love.”

1. *Love (Thy Neighbor): What is It?*

What I would like to emphasize, about love, is that love involves *behavior* (i.e., it is not just a *feeling*), and that loving behavior can be thought of as occurring on three different “scales” (or levels). First, there is love in the sense of an individual’s doing for others in the immediate present. For example, this can involve (to, first, draw upon *Job* 29:11-17) helping the poor and orphans, helping widows find security, being eyes for the blind and feet for the lame, taking the side of strangers in trouble, destroying the power of cruel people and rescuing their victims, and always acting justly). And can involve (drawing now from *Matthew* 25:31-45) feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving strangers into one’s home, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting those in prison. It can also involve indirect actions such as the utterly brilliant ones presented in the Pentateuch (again, see my discussion in “Worship . . .” cited earlier.

At a “higher” (although certainly not more *important*) level there is loving behavior which involves working to convince governmental and/or other organizations (e.g., churches, foundations, service clubs) to initiate programs to help the needy in various ways (food pantries, scholarships, recreational programs, building homes for the poor, etc.). Finally, there is loving behavior based on the assumption that the existing social order is structurally unjust, and which, therefore, involves work to bring about a better social order (via peaceful means, of course—means consistent with the end).

Much more could, of course, be (and has been!) written about what “love” means (i.e., what it can entail), but my intent here is to provide just enough explication of “love” to provide a basis for a discussion of how Christians have *evaded* Jesus’s love-the-neighbor command over the centuries. My approach here is systematic rather than historical; and given this, I would identify three “strategies” that have been used, by Christians (and others, for that matter), to evade the love command:

- Interpreting it “weakly” (thereby weekly!).
- Ignoring it in favor of a “more important” orientation.
- Rejecting it outright as unnecessary, or the wrong approach for helping others.

Given that a “user” may receive abundant outside support for his/her behavior—which may, indeed, be praised as being meritorious—the “user” has all the more reason for not harboring feelings of guilt. In our society “success”—meaning especially monetary success—is prized above all; and although becoming successful often involves “using” others, this “using” is usually hidden from view—and if brought to light, denied vociferously. Excuses such as the ones discussed in this essay are constantly being used to rationalize exploitative behavior, these excuses being used so frequently that they are widely accepted as truths, rather than seen for what they are. It is precisely because this is the case that I feel compelled to write this essay.

2. *The Dilution Solution*

Some Christians would agree with the proposition that one should not do things to others that which would affect their well-being negatively in any way, and would even agree that the needy should be given help. But they may also believe that the reason that they should give to others is either that they will gain “points” for so doing, or that they have an *obligation* to do so. They therefore give grudgingly, and without developing any empathy for those to whom they are giving. Indeed, they may prefer to give, not directly to those in need but, rather, to organizations (such as the Salvation Army) established to serve the needy; this way they will not have to come into direct contact with those in need—people, after all, who they likely regard as inferior to themselves in various respects (if only in being dirty, uneducated, etc.). Although these people may give to “charities,” because they lack empathy for the recipients of their donations, they tend to be niggardly in their giving—and, of course, prefer to do their giving through, e.g., “charity balls” which give them social standing while fulfilling (in a very minor way) their Christian obligations. As I stated earlier, given that the rich in our society (including rich “Christians”²¹⁶) typically lack empathy for the less fortunate (living in a gated community does not conduce the development of such feelings!), it is most advisable for those in that category who sincerely want to help the less fortunate to give money to appropriate organizations.²¹⁷

3. *The “Sweep It Under the Rug” Solution*

Another strategy is to perform a “sleight of hand” in the sense of diverting attention away from the love-the-neighbor command by arguing that the “heart” of being a Christian involves some other orientation—thereby subordinating, or even ignoring entirely, the love command. There are several possibilities here:

- a. One may argue that what being a good Christian entails, above all, is refraining from *vices* (i.e., “worldly” activities): drinking, smoking, cursing, gambling, playing cards, fornicating, dancing, going to movies, wearing makeup/jewelry, etc. Doing *for* others is not among one’s behavioral requirements; keeping oneself “pure,” rather, is one’s basic behavioral requirement. With this strategy there is reference to proper behavior, but the behavior involved is *non* behavior—*not* doing certain things—with the focus being on not engaging in behaviors harmful to oneself (rather than on *engaging* in behaviors of an ethical nature—i.e., ones contributing to the well-being of others). There is embedded in this strategy a notion of “holiness,” which is held as more important than the command to love the neighbor (which command may be totally ignored by those who follow this strategy). In light of Jesus’s love-the-neighbor command, however, this strategy involves

216 Is not “rich Christian” an oxymoron? (A rhetorical question, of course!) The point being that if one is rich, likely this is because one is “possessed” . . . by the society=s dominant values (greed, materialism, and selfishness). One born into wealth has (as Thorstein Veblen noted in *Leisure Class*) an ability to escape the influence of the dominant values, but few take advantage of that opportunity. Most of Veblen’s writings are available online on the following web site: <http://de.geocities.com/veblenite/> .

217 Is it not the case, however, that if they were truly sincere, they would not isolate themselves from the needy? Ironically, they may have domestics working in their homes (these often being illegals!); but rather than developing any sense of empathy for those individuals, they simply *use* them, exploit them. The “they” here referring to “Christians” as well as “heathen”!

blasphemy rather than holiness—for it asserts, in effect, that Jesus’s love command is not from the God of the Bible.

- b. Related to this theological position is one which focuses on not committing *sins* (i.e., not doing things that might negatively influence the well-being of others). It’s possible that one who adopts this position allows the legal system of his/her society to define wrongdoing; so that the person in question will equate unlawful behavior and sin. But it’s also possible that some who hold this theological position will not be so sanguine as to the law’s invariant “rightness,” and will strongly oppose certain laws as permitting (what for them are) sinful actions (e.g., abortions). Often, in fact, it seems that people in this latter category tend to be “one-issue” people who concentrate on one “sin” they see to the exclusion of all others. The important point here, however, is that these people become so obsessed with some particular “sin”—so engrossed with acting to stamp it out—that they are able to block the love command from their minds. And in the process engage in actions that are anything but loving.
- c. Some reach the conclusion that for one to be a “good Christian” (or even a Christian, period), one must *believe* certain “facts” regarding Jesus and God: there is a God, Jesus was born of a virgin, Jesus was a divine being (the one and only Son of God, indeed), Jesus was crucified, Jesus was resurrected, Jesus subsequently ascended to Heaven, etc. *This* is the heart of being a Christian, they assert; proper behavior is *not* what being a Christian is all about—except that one must attend church regularly and give one’s “tithes” to support one’s particular Christian local church/denomination. There is no emphasis on engaging in loving acts; there is not even an emphasis on *refraining* from vices and sins. Rather, the focus is on assenting to (i.e., claiming to accept as true) certain “facts,” to *believing* certain things.
- d. Closely related to the above view is the position that, as a “good” Christian, one has behavioral obligations, but that they are limited to doing “religious” things: going to church on a regular basis, participating in the rituals of the denomination in question, serving on church committees . . . and giving money to the church (“giving God His due”). What one does outside church is not what’s important for “Christianhood.” Note here that the focus is directed away from the love command, to “being religious,” and *that* is given a basically cultic interpretation. Being “good” involves, true, behaving in a “proper” manner, but engaging in behavior that is purely cultic/ritualistic, without any reference to the welfare of other people. (What an insult to the God of the Old and New Testaments!)
- e. Some emphasize that being a good Christian involves doing what’s necessary to get into Heaven, and not worrying overly much about how one relates to others. Following this interpretation may very well involve refraining from actions that would tend to hurt others, and engaging in some “good works.” But, one insists, there is no need to do such works out of a sense of empathy for others; and one can, in good conscience, restrict oneself to those good works (such as charity balls) that put one in contact with the right people—and minimize the possibility of contact with “riff raff.” Basically, what’s involved here is a shunting aside of the love of neighbor command, replacing it with the “more important” (but unBiblical!) principle that one should keep one’s eyes focused on

a possible afterlife in Heaven, and restrict oneself to doing what's necessary to arrive safely in Heaven after death. Insofar as the love command is given attention, it is subordinated to other concerns; for one's orientation is away from life here on earth in the here-and-now, and toward a possible blissful future existence in Heaven—for oneself. And to reach that goal, what's necessary is simply to gather enough "points" along the way!

- f. With a few, a "good" Christian is one who is a doer of productive work, one who puts in an "honest day's labor" every day—whether working for oneself, for an employer, or working as an unpaid housewife. Basically, the argument here goes: One should mind one's own business, and should feel no obligation to do for others. One should, however, stay away from vices, primarily because they hinder one from being as productive as one might otherwise be. (This is a simplified version of John Calvin's perspective on Christianity—which, in turn, can be thought of as having a basis in Economics thinking.²¹⁸)

This theological position ignores the love-the-neighbor command completely; it asserts that what's important is being a "good Christian," defines that in terms of behavior, but defines "proper behavior" in a rather peculiar way, Biblically speaking—being productive in the economy. Note that the view discussed under 5.b below is related to this one—in the sense of being a more comprehensive version of this one, even though it makes no *explicit* reference to being productive.

4. *Rejection: "It's Not Necessary!"*

- a. A *potential*²¹⁹ argument along these lines would go as follows: "There is no special class of people with needs; rather, a hierarchy of needs²²⁰ exists, and an implication of this fact is that *everyone* is needy. When one satisfies one's lower-level needs (and everyone can), *new* needs come into play; when one satisfies the needs at the next level, *another* set of needs enters the picture; etc. Therefore, although it may be true that the poor have some difficulty satisfying their needs, they are by no means unique in this respect. *All* of us are faced with difficulties as we go about the business of attempting to satisfy our needs; so that although it may be true that the poor need some help, the same can be said regarding everyone."

Some may even add to this argument: "Given that the poor are not contributing members of the society but, rather, are a burden on it, it is simply *wrong* to give aid to the poor. If help is given to anyone, it should be to those who are contributing members of the society

218 Did Calvin's theology have a direct influence on the thinking of, e.g., Adam Smith or, rather, was the influence indirect?

219. I have not yet actually encountered this argument, but suspect that some day I will.

220. Evidently this idea originated with Abraham Maslow. For a discussion of the theories of Maslow and others go to, e.g.: <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html>.

who, nonetheless, are not being compensated in accordance with the magnitude of their contribution.”

- b. A second argument in this heading is that *progress* is an inevitable feature of historical change, and that because this occurs through the operation of “natural” forces, actions to provide assistance to those in need might very well “interfere” with those natural forces, and thereby do more harm than good. Besides, even though some are needy now, this situation will not last forever: the fact of inevitable progress means that the magnitude of neediness in the society will diminish over time, and eventually be reduced to zero. Because, then, helping those in need is not necessary—and there’s a good chance that such actions could even be harmful, because of their potentially “interfering” nature—one should not address whatever neediness exists in the society.

5. *Rejection: “It’s the Wrong Approach to Helping Others”!*

Yes, there are, and have been, Christians who have attacked the love command head on; and have done so not because they lack (according to them, at least!) an interest in the welfare of others but, rather, precisely because they *have* (they claim) such an interest! There are at least two sorts of arguments of this sort:

- a. People who have needs have brought their problems on themselves. For example, they are *lazy*, which is why they are poor. They *could* decide to work, but they prefer to be lazy—and therefore must suffer the consequences. True, I as a Christian should have love for others, but what I need to exhibit in most cases, it seems, is “tough love.” That is, I must let those with problems come—on their own—to the realization that it has been *their own* actions (or inaction) which has brought about their problems. In time, they will come to that realization; if I step in and give them help, I am doing them a disservice because I am thereby postponing the time when they will come to their senses.

Although a major reason (these people continue) why people have problems is that they are lazy, and therefore poor, another major reason is that people develop *bad habits* which result in problems for themselves and their families. For example, some turn to drink and cigarettes; they thereby waste money on things which do them no good and, indeed, contribute to their ill-health. Those habits may interfere with job performance, and result in getting fired—so that they lack income. Some people get obsessed with gambling and, of course, end up losing money that could have gone to pay the rent, buy groceries, etc. If we help people with bad habits, they will never come to the realization that their problems are caused by their bad habits—habits which they have freely chosen; habits which no one has forced upon them. Therefore, we do a disservice to those who have problems as a consequence of bad habits if we don’t simply give them time to come to the realization that they need to “shape up.”

As Christians, it’s true that we have an obligation to help others. But it seems that so often those with problems have *chosen* to have those problems; not necessarily directly, but at least indirectly. Given this, they need to choose to do otherwise, and that is something that we cannot force them to do. What we need to do, rather, is give them time to come to the realization that they *can* improve their lot (after all, they *can* in this

free country)—and let them decide so to do. True, we may experience some pain as we watch those with problems suffer. But we must steel ourselves to the fact that our “help” really would amount to *interference*; our “help” would hinder realization of the solution.

- b. And there’s this more sophisticated position: Contrary to popular opinion, selfishness is *good* for the society. After all, did not Adam Smith²²¹ state, in Chapter II, Book IV, of his *Wealth of Nations* (1776)²²² that “By pursuing his own interest . . . [a person] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it”? Therefore, rather than *trying* to help others (and not harm them), one should concentrate on pursuing what one perceives as *one’s own* interests; for if everyone did this, the general welfare would be served well. In short, be selfish, and don’t in the least feel guilty about it; being selfish *is* being Christian; for the good Christian is one who has a *societal* perspective, acts for the good of the society, and *therefore* acts to pursue his (or her) own interests: this is the highest way of interpreting, and then acting in accord with, the love-the-neighbor command. (Wow! And to think that we can thank a group of respected “intellectuals”—Economists—for this theory! And to think, further, that colleges and universities have Departments of Economics, and still call themselves “Christian” colleges/universities!)

Not only is selfishness good for the society, assert these people. God has *designed* us to be aggressive *and* selfish by nature, and we blaspheme God by trying to go against our God-given natures. Because, however, aggressive behavior does not have the good societal consequences that selfish behavior has (God appears to have made a mistake here!), we should try to control aggressive behavior—and *can* do so especially by creating institutions that will tend to keep such behavior in check, thereby minimizing the harm done by such activity²²³ (so that God has provided us with an “out,” and didn’t make a mistake after all!). We can also control aggressive behavior via drug-taking, eugenics, and genetic engineering; but because many in the society have objections to at least some of these other measures, it is best to seek institutional answers to the problems created by aggressive behavior.

The basic message of this Economics-oriented argument is that loving others in a *direct* way, at least, is inadvisable because it represents interference with the “natural order.” That if the economic system is allowed to operate without interference (especially from governments—which can *only* interfere!), the result will be that everyone will receive in

221 On Smith see, e.g., Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1993.

222 I should note that this book is not as original as is frequently claimed, for what Smith basically did was merely apply Newtonian physical principles to the economy. And this poisonous analogy has been with us ever since in that a norm is used that should have been abandoned decades ago. Unfortunately, a strong Economics school never developed from Thorstein Veblen’s body of work—for the simple reason that his work did not serve the interests of the elite or, more generally, the System—and that Veblen was much more than an Economist.

223 This sort of reasoning was used by those who created our Constitution—and was especially present in the thinking of James Madison

accordance with what they *deserve*: if they contribute a great deal to the society, they will be rewarded in proportion to their contribution; if they contribute little, they will receive little in the way of a reward. The income one receives, that is, is a measure of the magnitude of one's contribution to the society. A fair and just society is the sort of society that we should strive for, and the "market system" yields such a society, so long as governmental interference does not occur.

What individuals should work for, then, is minimization of governmental (and other) interference in the economy, on the one hand; and minimization of private charity, on the other. If one really and truly wishes to live by the love command, one will see "the big picture" and, therefore, act in a manner that focuses on the welfare of the society as a whole. For thereby one promotes the interests of all of those who are members of the society.

In short, distribution should not be on the basis of *need* but, rather, *desert*. And fortunately we live in a society within which distribution *does* tend to occur on that basis. Our primary task, then, as Christians is to adopt a societal perspective and work to prevent sand from getting into our economy's gears. *That* will occur if government and/or private individuals/organizations attempt to interfere with the economy's operation.

6. *Conclusions*

There are, then, a number of theories/ideologies "out there"—regarding the nature of Christianity, of God, of the human *qua* human, of society—that are "in the air" and, thereby, basically invisible. Because of the latter lack, they can influence the thinking and behavior of people in the society—Christian and other—without their being conscious of that fact. And, in the process, those theories/ideologies can—and do—provide people with excuses for not heeding the love command. And what's particularly unfortunate about this fact is that the presence of these theories/ideologies in our "intellectual atmosphere" is that they can cause people in the society to "trick" people into ignoring Jesus's love command—and in good conscience.

The categories that I have identified above are not mutually exclusive, in that it is certainly possible that a given person might "partake" of more than one of the "theological" positions cataloged above. I may have missed certain important categories in my classification, but I believe that the classification does a reasonably good job of indicating the variety of ways that Christians have, over the centuries, evaded Jesus's basic command (as recorded in the gospels, at any rate) to love the neighbor.

How many Christians (e.g., how many Christian Americans today) would fall into one or more of those categories? This would be an interesting question for an empirical study (undertaken at one of the many "Christian colleges/universities in our society"); and although it's possible that some researcher has provided some answers to this question, I must admit that I am not aware of such a study. And, to be honest, I must admit that I myself at least fall into the first category—of those who don't give enough effort to living by the love-the-neighbor command. (At least I am perfectly willing to admit this deficiency in myself, and find it easy to relate to Paul's discussion,

in *Romans*, to the effect that I find myself doing things that I wish I hadn't done, and *not* doing things that I wish I *had* done.)

But to return to the question at hand: How many (American) Christians today would fall into one or more of the above categories? I have no empirically-based numbers at hand relative to this question, but would guess—based on my many years of living, during that time having lived in different parts of the United States (from Oregon to Ohio to North Carolina), and having been associated with several Protestant denominations (and with some of my best friends being Roman Catholics)—that very few Christians would *not* be in at least one of those categories. This, of course, is an extremely damning comment regarding Christianity in the United States! It is to say, in effect, that Christianity is a fraudulent religion in that the central teaching of its putative founder is, at most, merely given lip service by the vast majority of its adherents.

Which raises the further question: Where are the prophets in our midst with the courage to point out the sham which is Christianity? We have more than enough people out there (i.e., scholars) who have pointed out the fact that much of the belief-structure of Christianity has little, if any, basis in historical or scientific fact. But where are the prophets—i.e., the people who understand that Jesus's central command was to love the neighbor, who have tried to “operationalize” that directive, and have thereby been able not only to critique extant Christianity but to chart possible courses for Christians consistent with the love command? There are some out there, true, but they are few in number—and so often lacking in a solid background in the social/psychological (and other) sciences. (Put another way, I am aware of no prophet out there with anywhere near the intellect and breadth of knowledge of the late [died 1929] Thorstein Veblen, our last great prophet.²²⁴)

Finally, there is the question: Why is it—most basically—that so few Christians in the United States live by the “Jesuan” love command? And the answer, it seems to me, is one that Thorstein Veblen (in effect) pinpointed in his classic *The Theory of The Leisure Class* (1899). In that brilliant book Veblen pointed out that if one is to *succeed* (even *survive*) in this society, one must be at least somewhat in thrall to the “worldly” values which govern our society (greed, materialism, and selfishness)—which values are in conflict with the love-the-neighbor command. (Jules Henry is a notable example of a more recent scholar who argued along the same lines.) In this society one can either adopt worldly values and then become “successful” (especially if one has also exercised wisdom in the selection of one's parents), *or* one can adopt “Jesuan” values and be a failure. There are, of course, exceptions to this “rule,” but the point is that they are exceptions.

Is there any reason to have hope that Christianity will become (and soon) “converted” into a religion that actually can legitimately claim a genetic relationship with the ministry of Jesus? I find it *conceivable* that such a transformation could occur. But, I do not regard such a transformation as *likely*. What, rather, appears to me far more likely is that Christianity will *not* become converted, that NeWFism will (unfortunately) fail to get underway, and that *therefore*

224. The fact that few “religious” are even familiar with Veblen's writings is itself a sad commentary on their intellectual state.

humankind will continue on its suicidal path of self-destruction (via global eco-catastrophe). Some of the “pious” in our midst might declare that this won’t happen because God won’t allow it to. My response: “Yah, sure; tell that to the families of Holocaust victims!”

NeWFian Theology

James B. Gray

I have just completed reading a rather haughty commentary on three recent books that argue the atheist position—books authored by Richard Dawkins, Samuel Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. I label the commentary (“Amateur Atheists,” in the February 26, 2008, issue of *The Christian Century*) as “haughty” for two reasons: (1) Its author is John F. Haught of Georgetown University); and (2) the tone of the commentary is condescending—implying that he is an intellectual giant,²²⁵ and the three authors in question are, in contrast, intellectual midgets (please excuse the politically incorrect language)—especially in comparison with earlier generations of atheists (Haught singles out Marx, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre).

I mention Haught’s review here not so much because I want to critique his critique—and certainly have no intention here of defending atheism. Rather, I make reference to Haught’s commentary primarily because it stimulated me to clarify, in my mind, the theological ideas that I associate with NeWFism (see my “[Worship](#)” on this site). My “Worship” essay presents some of my theological ideas, but only incidentally and unsystematically—for my focus in that essay was other than theological matters. The Haught review, however, has caused me to conclude that I *should* write an essay that focuses just on the theological ideas that I associate with NeWFism—the result being this essay.

The first point that I would, then, make here is that the *referent* for the word “god” is not a constant across individual minds but, rather, a variable. At a given time “god” has had different meanings in different cultures—and even *within* a given culture. And the meaning of “god” has varied over historical time. To illustrate these points, if but briefly:

- From a *quantitative/qualitative* standpoint, “god” has been thought of in pluriform terms (polytheism); as singular, but local (henotheism); and as singular and universal (monotheism).

225 The good man reminds one of Thorstein Veblen’s toad: “Doubtless this form of words, ‘watchful waiting’ [Veblen had just used the term in his text—the statement quoted appearing in a footnote], will have been employed in the first instance to describe the frame of mind of a toad who has reached years of discretion and has found his appointed place along some frequented run to complete that identity to which it has pleased an all-seeing and merciful Providence to call them; but by an easy turn of speech it has also been found suitable to describe the safe and sane strategy of that mature order of captains of industry who are governed by sound business principles. There is a certain bland sufficiency spread across the face of such a toad so circumstanced, while his comely personal bulk gives assurance of a pyramidal stability of principles.” *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times: The Case of America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, pp. 109 – 110. First published by B. W. Huebsch, Inc., in 1923.

- In *functional* terms “god” has been thought of as the Creator, who created things and set them in motion; as a giver of laws; and as a Presence (i.e., an *immanent* Reality, rather than a *transcendent* Being).
- In *relational* terms “god” has been thought of as One who has given humans rules, and expects human obedience in return; and, conversely, as a “cosmic bellhop” for humans to petition, expecting that “god” will respond positively to those petitions (i.e., people doing for “god” vs. “god” doing for people—concepts that involve *identical* words but have *opposite* meanings²²⁶).

First, then, a single clear, consistent meaning *is* not—and *has* not been—given to “god.” So that if one declares oneself to be a “theist,” one has by no means conveyed much concrete information—unless one has continued by specifying the referent that one is attaching to the word. Likewise for one who declares oneself to be an “atheist.”

The importance of bringing in the historical dimension here is that it suggests that “once upon a time” the *concept* of “god” did not exist. Which fact, in turn, suggests additional questions, such as:

- *When* did the concept come into being?
- *What meaning* was given to “god” at the concept’s origin?
- What were the *antecedents* of the concept?
- *Why* did the concept come into existence?
- *How* has the concept evolved over time—and *why* did these changes occur?

As the fourth question here is of especial relevance for this essay, I will address only it here. In doing so, I would begin with the observation that seemingly there are two possible answers to this question:

- A Being with apparent supernatural powers—thereby warranting the name “god”—was observed “in person” by a number of people—*actually*, not just in stories, such as the stories of Moses’s encounters with “god.” These individuals made their observations public. Their descriptions largely coincided—warranting application of a single name to the Being in question (i.e., “god”). And because these individuals were credible, their assertions that there is a Being with attributes justifying the label “god” should be accepted by all. That is, all should accept the “truth” that a “god” having certain special—and definite—attributes exists—indeed, *has* always existed, and likely always *will* exist.
- Certain observations made by many individuals led them to believe that certain “forces” are associated with (i.e., are within or behind) various elements of nature. At some point (e.g., during the Neolithic village phase of human existence) those forces became *personified*—and

²²⁶ Thereby serving to make theological discourse a sort of Alice in Wonderland world.

“gods” (i.e., polytheism) thereby came into existence for the first time in history. Given that females were the dominant (but not dominating) sex at the time, the “gods” were, for the most part, conceived as female.²²⁷ And religion *per se* has its origin in the fact that certain individuals (shamans, then priests) arose who claimed to have an ability to control those forces/”gods” for human benefit—those individuals becoming the first specialists in human history.

Let me make clear at the outset that although the latter argument seemingly suggests that humans created “god”(s)—the reverse of the order given in Genesis—it does *not* assert that “god” is just a *subjective* reality existing only in people’s minds. It is true that some who accept this second explanation likely go to that extreme; but such a position is not *inherent* in the second explanation. Just as the fact that I learned about the existence of something last year *would* not be interpreting as meaning that that something didn’t exist before the time of my observation, so is it true that the possibility that humans first developed the *concept* of “god” during a certain period of historical time *should* not be interpreted to mean that thereby “god” did not exist before that time. There are, on the one hand, *objective truths* and, on the other, *subjective beliefs*—and the one should not be mistaken for the other.

Note, however, that the second explanation *does* suggest a belief that “god” has never *actually* been observed, and that the existence of “god” was *inferred* from certain observations. Now here’s the tricky part: if it is true—as I believe it is—that the concept of “god”—in plural form—initially arose with humans as a result of their personifying forces in nature that were inferred, and we now reject such a concept of “god”(s), it does not follow that we must simply, then, reject the concept of “god” *per se*. **For it is possible for us moderns to also think of “god” as the name for something that is inferred, but reject the *original* basis of that inference in favor of another basis (or other bases).** We reject the *original* basis because we now perceive the forces in question in the light of our understanding of scientific laws. We can, however, *retain*, the inferential approach of the ancients—knowing that “god” never has been *observed*, nor ever will be; but *believing*, nonetheless, that there *is* a something whose existence can be inferred, it being appropriate to use the name “god” for that something.

Those of us moderns who are theists in this latter sense do not expect to be able to establish our *belief* (stated above) as objectively true, and therefore do not expect to be able to “convert” all others to our version of theism. Nonetheless, because we firmly believe that there *is* a basis for believing in this something, and do not anticipate that others will be able to dissuade us from our belief (even though we attempt to remain as open-minded as possible to their arguments), we proceed with confidence with our particular belief system.

NeWFians, then, are theists (if of a rather unique sort), not *atheists*—nor even *untheists*. What is an *untheist*? If Person A informs Person B that he (A) is a theist, Person B may very well respond: “I believe that there *are* theists—for example, I will take your word that you are one—but I perceive no evidence that there is a Being that should be given the name “god.” For me, the “god” concept, therefore, is simply meaningless; the concept just doesn’t enter into my thought

²²⁷ Later, when males became dominant—and dominating—they of course “converted” the gods to the male sex, retaining only the Great Mother (the ancestor of the contemporary “virgin Mary”) as a female deity.

processes—which I why I would, if forced, call myself an *untheist*. I feel it inappropriate to call myself an *atheist* because I feel no need to *disprove* the existence of “god”—any more than I feel a need to disprove the existence of unicorns.

NeWFians are not *untheists*, nor are they *atheists*. Rather, they are theists—but theists in a manner that distinguishes them from most other theists in American society. For that reason, I feel it necessary to try to provide some degree of clarity to the NeWFian variety of theism. And the nextt point that I need to make—as my “Worship” essay strongly suggests—is that although NeWFians have much in common, theologically, the fact that NeWFism prizes diversity means that the views here are my own, and will not be shared by all other NeWFians.

I, as a NeWFian, was raised in Christianity, and therefore have been strongly influenced by the particular Christian denominations (mostly Protestant) to which I have been exposed—as well as the Bible, of course. I have had, however, some exposure to other religions (but only by way of reading about them), and would begin a discussion of my theological perspective by taking note of the fact that some refer to Buddhism as an atheistic religion—which, given my limited knowledge of the religion, strikes me as an erroneous judgment. I agree with those who would say that Buddhism is a *godless* religion; it does not, however, follow from that (presumed) fact that Buddhism is an *atheistic* religion.

The Buddhist position, as I understand it, is that the Reality commonly given the name “god” is basically unknowable. And that because that Reality has substance, yet is unknowable, it is foolish to claim knowledge regarding it. Indeed, it borders on blasphemy to claim knowledge about it—so that one is advised to refrain from god-talk. Doing so makes it appear to the unenlightened that one’s position is atheistic; the reality, however, is anything but that. Rather, one, as a Buddhist, is so respectful of that Reality that one does want to engage in the sacrilege of god-talk—and therefore doesn’t.

Intellectually, I have great sympathy for the Buddhist position (as I understand it). However, as one who has been raised in Christianity—and therefore bombarded with god-talk—I find that I am simply *incapable* of eschewing god-talk. What I am forced to do, then, is find a way of engaging in god-talk that is compatible with my beliefs regarding the origins of the god concept and religion, my perception of the Bible’s thrust, my acceptance of modern science—along with, e.g., my respect for the Buddhist position. Satisfying these various requirements is no easy task! I believe, however, that I *have* arrived at a theological position that does satisfy all of the above requirements.

Before presenting that theological position, however, I feel compelled to comment on the closing (rhetorical) question posed by Haught (referred to in the first paragraph above): “Can you rationally justify your unconditional adherence to timeless values without implicitly invoking the existence of God?” It’s clear from the context that Haught assumes that the answer to his question is an unequivocal “Yes!” However, I would point out that there is perspective—one of which he is unaware, obviously—that would reject that claim. A perspective, in fact, that has a decidedly more firm basis than the one that Haught represents.

Because I do not want to be carried too far afield here, I will eschew detailed references to supporting scholarly literature and focus instead on the perspective itself. The perspective in

question states that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago there was co-development of humans as biological entities and ways of life (most of which can be characterized as gatherer-hunter—or “cynegetic,” to use Paul Shepard’s useful term). This means that as humans were developing as biological entities, their way of life was developing in a fashion that “fit” them; and that at the same time they were shaping their way of life in a manner compatible with their changing biological nature. The occurrence of this co-development meant that by the time of the Agricultural Revolution there was a close harmony, within any given human group, between the biology of its members and their way of life. (Note that this argument owes nothing to Charles Darwin—or, as I like to say, Chuck Darwin, with emphasis on the “chuck”!).

The Agricultural Revolution, however, disturbed this hard-won harmony. Ways of life began to change (and at an accelerating rate²²⁸), whereas human biology remained basically unchanged. In the words of David Barash, there has been a “tortoise” and “hare” phenomenon—with a growing discrepancy between the way of life that is “natural” to us and the way of life that we actually are forced to lead. This discrepancy can be “credited” with virtually all of the problems that humankind has experienced since the advent of the Agricultural Revolution—but developing an argument in support of *that* assertion cannot occur in this essay, for that is a subject unto itself.

There is, however, a consequence of that discrepancy that *does* have relevance for this essay, and that is the rise of the Tradition that I discussed in “Worship.” As the discrepancy was growing in size, some Perceptive Ones began to sense that something was amiss: the well-being which had prevailed before (they knew at least from stories handed down) was being replaced by widespread *ill-being*—resulting from the exploitation of the many by an emerging few. These Perceptive Ones concluded that the solution to this growing problem was to convince the “haves” of their society to give to the “have nots”—with the Perceptive Ones in Palestine developing the absolutely brilliant idea of “converting” their local god into a champion of the people. (Again, see my “Worship” for details.) As a consequence, “prophets” arose to rail against the elite in the name of their newly-created god, and at a later point the prophetic point of view was worked into a set of ethical laws which, functioning side by side with cultic ones, became the basis of Judaism—and crucial to the ministry of Jesus.

Thorstein Veblen, in his brilliant 1910 “Christian Morals and the Competitive System,”²²⁹ argued that the defining traits of Christianity, at its beginnings, were “non-resistance (humility) and brotherly love.” He went on to state:

It is commonly held that these principles are not inherent traits of human nature as such, congenital and hereditary traits of the species which assert themselves instinctively, impulsively, by force of the mere absence of repression. Such, at least, in effect, is the teaching of the Christian creeds, in that they hold these spiritual qualities to be a gift of divine grace, not a

²²⁸ The Industrial Revolution that began about 1750 caused a notable acceleration, and, e.g., the Electronics Revolution of more recent years has simply added to that acceleration.

²²⁹ Originally published in *The International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. XX (January 1910), pp. 168 – 85, but available at http://de.geocities.com/veblenite/txt/ch_moral.txt

heritage of sinful human nature. Such an account of their origin and their acquirement by the successive generations of men does not fit these two main supports of Christian morality in the same degree. It may fairly be questioned as regards the principle of brotherly love, or the impulse to mutual service. While this seems to be a characteristic trait of Christian morals and may serve as a specific mark by which to distinguish this morality from the greater non-Christian cults, it is apparently a trait which Christendom shares with many of the obscurer cultures, and which does not in any higher degree characterize Christendom than it does these other, lower cultures.[230]

Veblen, in this article, makes a number of other statements of relevance here, but I would need to quote the entire article to make note of them—and that would get me too far off track! Suffice it to say that Veblen was the first person, to my knowledge, to recognize that the ethics of Jesus—and the prophets before him—come from *human nature* rather than Divinity. True, Veblen did not develop the discrepancy concept (nor did Barash, for that matter!), but he laid the foundation for the development of that concept—and a number of scholars since his time have contributed to the development of that concept. Their focus, however, has been on the implications of the discrepancy for human ill-being (physical and mental) rather than on the development of Judaism and Christianity. In a sense, then, what I wish to do here is develop a perspective not developed by people such as Barash—a perspective that stems directly, and especially, from Veblen’s 1910 article.

My position here, then, is (and I regard it to be firmly grounded) that the ethical principles that we hold dear—and see presented in the Bible—do not derive from God but, rather, are expressions of human nature. A human nature, I need to add, that is basically repressed by the society that we live in—and found nowhere today in its pure form. Insofar as contemporary “primitive” gatherer-hunter groups are representative of like groups that existed prior to the Agricultural Revolution, however, the fact that something close to “Christian morals” was associated with those groups means that *contemporary* gatherer-hunter groups are the only ones with which “Christian morals” are associated to a significant degree. Certainly the United States does not qualify—unless one somehow believes that supporting repressive regimes, trying to assassinate the leaders of foreign countries,²³¹ attacking small countries (illegally at that) on the basis of lies, torturing prisoners, etc., constitute “Christian” behavior. Surely, our President is a wonderful Christian, is he not?!

Haught’s implied assertion, then, that “timeless values” owe their existence to God is nonsense. On the one hand, the values that we “hold up” have an evolutionary origin—whether or not Haught, or his atheist friends, accept that truism. And on the other hand, one does not need to be a theist to accept those values. Indeed, one’s theological position is simply irrelevant for acceptance of those values, for they stem from the principle that one should not do unto others what one would not want done unto oneself and, conversely, that one *should* do unto others what one *would* like done to oneself (as, e.g., Immanuel Kant realized). If anything, the most evil that has been committed in the world since the time of Jesus has been committed by Christians!—their treatment of Native Americans simply being the most notable example.

230 For those not familiar with Veblen’s writings, let me clue you in here that this is but one example of Veblen’s “tongue in cheek” statements.

231 See, e.g., William Blum’s web site: <http://www.killinghope.org> . Blum is an ex-CIA employee.

Is my position on the origin of our “timeless values” at odds with my theological perspective? All of my essays on this web site contain facets of my theological perspective; can it be said that the theological ideas therein presented are compatible with the ideas that I have stated so far in this essay—compatible in particular with my assertion that the NeWFian—but not *just* NeWFians—should regard God as their Master, not their Servant (i.e., “cosmic bellhop”)? Was not I, in making that statement, in effect asserting that God should be thought of as a Being “out there” who has the attributes conventionally associated with God (i.e., a discrete Being with omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.)?

My answer is that in that particular essay I was trying to identify an important distinction that can be made, *assuming the conventional concept of God*. I did not state that latter assumption, because clarification would have required attention to topics that would have diverted attention from my major point. Now, though, given that my focus is on theological matters, I can state that I do not accept the conventional concept of God, but do not therefore reject the God concept. Indeed, it seems to me that the mistake commonly made by atheists is that they think that if they find the conventional concept of God problematic, their only choice is to become atheists.

But I disagree! A more sensible reaction to the “discovery” that the conventional God concept is problematic, it seems to me, is to develop a *new* God concept!! The basis for such development being that one continues to believe, with Buddhists, that there *is* a Reality that warrants recognition. “Recognition,” for Buddhists may mean the eschewal of God-talk. For those of us who have been raised in Christianity, however, what’s required is that we continue to engage in God-talk, but begin to conceive God in a manner that makes sense to us as modern Americans. Besides, many of us feel a need to continue with God-talk for the psychological reason that we have grown used to such talk, and feel comfortable with it, thus unwilling to abandon it.

If some of us feel this way, we must, then, re-conceive “God,” doing so in a manner that we find acceptable. Given that the Reality involved here is one that can only be inferred, it of course follows that different people will arrive at different concepts of God. NeWFism not only *recognizes* this; it *welcomes* it—and also tries to provide experiences to participants that will contribute to their theological development. As I state in “Worship,” what unites NeWFians is not adherence to a particular theology but, rather, commitment to a certain set of procedures to be used during religious meetings.

Although NeWFians can be expected to be a diverse group theologically, I would like to think that they would be united in thinking of “God” as not merely an *intellectual construct*—so that a detailed definition of God may exist in a person’s head, but that’s all. Rather, I would like to think that for NeWFians in general “God” would be an *experience*. That is, certain kinds of experiences that people have would be thought of as somehow connected with “God.” The experiences to which I am referring here would, of course, be subjective in nature. But because the experiences of one NeWFian would resemble those of another NeWFian, this coincidence of experiences would provide evidence to those concerned that there was, in fact, a Reality associated with those experiences.

What sorts of experiences am I referring to here? I would identify three—although there may very well be more that do not occur to me at the moment (and did not occur to me when I wrote “Worship”). These three—all given some attention in “Worship”—are:

- Feeling “high” as the result of a NeWF session that has generated some novel ideas, with all participants having had contributed to those ideas. The terminology that *I* would use for this phenomenon is “Holy Spirit possession,” and I would contend that such a feeling was what Paul of Tarsus was alluding to in referring to Spirit-filling. And like Paul (e.g., see Galatians 5), I would contend that this Spirit-filling will have positive behavioral implications for those who experience it.
- Related to this first point, I would identify the source of the creativity that occurred as the Holy Spirit. As a consequence, I for one have no desire to pursue a rationalistic explanation of the phenomenon. This may be a mere “practical” decision on my part, but “that’s my story, and I’m stickin’ to it”!
- Those who experience Spirit-possession may very well find that they perceive God—in the form of the Holy Spirit—not only dwelling within themselves, but within the surround. That is, they may experience God as a Presence that envelops everything in the surround, thereby making it holy. So that, in being holy, one will regard as sacrilege actions that pollute (even if via litter), despoil that surround. The point here is not that one perceives the surround as *created*²³² by God, and thereby holy; rather, one senses the Presence of God within the surround, and *that’s* what makes it holy.

These ways of thinking about God are likely to seem strange—and thereby unacceptable, even heretical—by many readers with a Christian background. In concluding this essay let me, therefore, remind the reader of two rather interesting passages in the New Testament:

- In the gospel of John (4:24) we find the declaration that “God is spirit”
- In 1 John 4:16 we find “God is love” Not God is *loving*, mind you, but God *is* love.

There is, then, in the New Testament “witness” to the conception of God, not as a substantive Being but, rather, as a Reality that is intangible and invisible. And there is also witness to a conception of God as not even a Reality “out there” but, rather, a *relationship* that exists between people. Thus, if my theological discussion here strikes you as “radical,” keep in mind that I got my radicalism from the Bible!!

²³² Note that to think of God as Creator is merely to *intellectualize* about God. Our rape of Nature, indeed, can be attributed to the fact that most Christians have merely intellectualized about God.

People of the Book

James B. Gray

Jews, Christians, and Moslems are often referred to as “people of the book,” the conventional basis for so referring to such people being that each group has a book which has the status of Scripture for that group—respectively, the Hebrew Bible (what Christians refer to—insultingly (to Jews)—as the “Old Testament”), the Christian Bible (consisting of “Old” and “New” Testaments), and the Qu’ran. The questions raised here are:

- Is this the only *possible* meaning that can be given to “people of the book”?
- If it is not, is it the *best* possible of the alternatives?

Before proceeding to address these questions, however, it would be well to clarify the implications of applying the label “Scripture” to a book (or collection of books—as with both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles).

A book anointed with the label “Scripture” is, first, thought of by those so regarding the book as partaking of divinity in some sense. For some adherents to a given “faith,” their Scripture is thought of as either *written* by God or written by people *inspired* by God. As the first view is somewhat hard to swallow—to say the least!—the more common view as to what qualifies a book as “Scripture” is the second one.

Given this common view of what qualifies a book as “Scripture,” it follows that the contents of the book are not to be questioned—for after all, who are we, as mere mortals, to question the “word of God”? Given that the Scripture in question can be thought of as consisting (at minimum) of statements of (1) historical fact and (2) commandments—originating from God, and intended to be applicable to everyone, everywhere, always, not just intended for those to whom they were directed historically—one who accepts a given book as “Scripture” is expected to accept (1) all of the factual claims made in the book and to accept (2) all of the commandments therein stated. Not only accept those commandments intellectually, but actually—i.e., to live in accordance with them (asking God for forgiveness when one “falls—especially in the sense of committing a sin of commission).

“People of the book,” then, are most commonly thought of as—and *only* as—those who attribute a divine connection with some given book and who, therefore, perceive the book in question as *authoritative*. That is, if a factual claim that appears in the Scripture is in conflict with a factual claim made elsewhere, the former is to be accepted rather than the latter. And if a “should” or “should not” assertion that appears in the Scripture is not in agreement with a like assertion that appears elsewhere, the former is to be embraced, not the latter.

Those who claim for themselves the status of “people of the book” claim, then, that they have their particular beliefs and values because they have derived them from their Scripture. In actuality, this is often—usually?—a lie in that it’s more likely that their beliefs and values have a different origin, and Scripture simply “mined” for support of their previously-established beliefs and values (whether regarding slavery, abortion, homosexuality, or whatever). But that is not the

matter that I wish to pursue here. Rather, I want to begin by noting that there is at least one other perspective on the meaning of “people of the book”—and then adding that this alternate perspective is the preferable one, because more *authentic*.

In presenting my alternate perspective the first point that I would like to make is that the “people of the book”—referring here specifically to the Christian Bible—were not, for the most part, “people of the book” in the sense described above. This may strike most readers as a strange assertion; because of this possibility, I have an obligation to explain myself here.

The Christian Bible can be thought of as consisting of a number of characters—who, together, constitute “people of the book” in a literal sense. That is, they are “people of the book” in the sense that their names appear in the book, and (purported) information is therein given about many of these individuals as to what they did, thought, and said.

Regarding these “people of the book” the first thing to note is that, with the exception of characters presented as members of the same biological family, most of the later-appearing characters seem to lack knowledge of earlier-appearing characters. That is, there is a general “disconnect” between the various characters referred to in the Bible. It’s as if a given later character did not feel any connection with Hebrews who had lived earlier, and therefore lacked an interest in educating himself or herself regarding those forebears.

Second, these individuals were not “people of the book” in the sense of looking to a Scripture for authoritative statements—either regarding what’s true or what’s good or what’s beautiful. It’s true that the gospels present a Jesus who had a *knowledge* of many of the Hebrew “holy” books of his time (gained through *hearing* them read). But whether this presentation reflects the historical Jesus or the gospel writers, it is clear that Jesus is presented in those gospels as one who did not take the Law literally but, rather, one who was audacious enough to “boil down” the Law into two Laws—love of God, this demonstrated through love of neighbor. Although the gospel writers do not accuse Jesus of thereby committing blasphemy (how could they!), it is likely that many of Jesus’s contemporaries—especially if members of the priestly class—so perceived this audacious act on Jesus’s part. And as to Paul, although he made numerous references to the Law in his letters, those letters provide no evidence that he had anything but a comic-book level of knowledge of the Law—a paradoxical fact, to say the least!

If these “people of the book” were not that—either because they *had* no book to be a people “of,” or because they were not fixated on the “holy” books of which they *did* have knowledge—what implication do these facts have for us moderns? I would not be so foolish to claim that there is but one reasonable answer to this question, but *would* assert that *my* answer to the question is as reasonable as any. It is that *we moderns should perceive these characters in the Bible as part of a Tradition—whether or not they so perceived themselves*.

What are the implications—for us moderns—of such a perception? My answer is that we moderns should, first, attempt to understand what that Tradition was “about”—which I perceive as obsession with human well-being. As I point out in my [“Worship”](#) on this site, the “Old Testament” Law can be thought of as having such an orientation (with the cultic Law therein playing a supporting role), and the New Testament can also be thought of as having the same orientation.

Second, we should come to recognize that (again as I pointed out in “Worship”) that that Tradition began before Bible times, and has continued since then.

Third, we moderns should *embrace* that Tradition. Which means that we should not only strive to *learn* about that Tradition, but become a *part* of it—i.e., *join* it. Insofar as such a perspective is more associated with the gospel of Thomas than, e.g., the gospel of John (written, Dr. Elaine Pagels has argued, to *combat* Thomas’s perspective) we should align ourselves with the former gospel rather than the latter. The question that we should set before us is not: “What would *Jesus* do if he were to come to Chicago?” (to allude to W. T. Stead’s book of a century ago) but, rather: “What should *I* do as one who is a member of the same Tradition that Jesus was?”

Once one has adopted that orientation, at least questions of a “religious” nature will need to be addressed:

- If I do not now belong to a Christian church, should I join one? If so, one of which denomination?
- If I do currently belong to a Christian church, should I continue my membership? If so, should I work to change the orientation of my fellow churchgoers? If not, should I join another Christian church, or simply discontinue my membership? And if I do the latter, should I cease attending any church or, rather, become part of another religion—or initiate, e.g., a NeWFian fellowship (again, see my “Worship”)?

I would hope that at least some of those who adopt the perspective advocated above would take the latter course! Not so much because I am the inventor of NeWFism but, rather, because I believe taking such a course is not only authentically “Traditional” but *necessary* for humankind’s “salvation.”

An Evolutionary Perspective on Matthew 25

James B. Gray

Jesus is quoted in Mark 12:29 – 31 as asserting that the most important commandment is to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, the second most important commandment being to love one's neighbor as oneself. Several years ago (1992, in "Evolutionary Aspects of Love and Empathy") Robin Allott referred to love of God, however, as a "difficult idea. If love is a transfer of the self-centre, the centre of gravity of oneself, with the incorporation of a model of the other along with or in the model of one's self, then how can a model of God be said to be incorporated in or introduced alongside the model of one's self? This remains a puzzle despite the voluminous writings of the mystics, both Christian and non-Christian."

The solution to Allott's "puzzle," however, lies in the Bible itself. For the "witness" of the Bible—as my [Worship](#) should make clear²³³—is that one loves God *by* loving the neighbor. That is, given that the God of the Bible is especially a command-giver, and that the essence of those commands is to engage in activities that amount to loving the neighbor, it follows that what "love of God" entails is loving the neighbor. Therefore, what Allott's statement reveals is a superficial knowledge of the Bible—such that the difficulties perceived, by Allott, in loving God, indicate ignorance rather than insight.

What loving the neighbor can involve, in Biblical terms, is expressed in some detail in what Christians refer to as the "Old Testament" (as I indicate in "Worship"). And Jesus elaborated, famously, on the commandment in Matthew 25:35 – 45)—wherein Matthew has him say, in effect, that loving the neighbor includes (but is not limited to) feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, receiving strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting those who have been (rightly or wrongly) imprisoned. That Matthew wanted to emphasize the contents of this "plan of salvation" offered by Jesus is indicated by the fact that he had Jesus repeat in *four* (4) times (in my *Good News Bible*, at any rate).

Still, one can raise the question: Did Jesus go far enough? Was it enough for him to simply identify types of behaviors that one can engage in that involve love of the neighbor? Does it follow that if people *know* what they should do, they will do it? Did not, in fact, Paul go beyond Jesus in recognizing (Romans 7:14 – 25) that he—and by implication *all* humans—knew what he *should* do, but failed to do it; and also knew what he should *not* do—but did it anyway?

Paul attributed this failure on his part to "my human nature [which] serves the law of sin" (v. 25 in my *Good News Bible*). But did he locate the source of his (perceived) problem correctly? The elites that control our Western societies would like us to believe as much—for such a belief on the part of the masses serves the interests of the elite. But if one examines humans from a historical—and especially evolutionary—point of view, one will reach the conclusion, rather, that such a viewpoint is in serious error. Indeed, Allott (whose article appeared in the *Journal of*

²³³ A cautionary note: In my "Worship" I did not attempt to summarize the Bible but, rather, to note that a Tradition has been in existence for centuries, and that the Bible provides an important record of a portion of that Tradition. The NeWFism that I advocate in "Worship" I see as a part of that Tradition (unlike, e.g., Christianity).

*Social and Evolutionary Systems*²³⁴) went so far as to make the startling assertion that : “Love in its most developed form is to be seen not as a lucky accident, an undeserved blessing for humanity, but as an explanation of and a necessity for the course which human development has taken.” Put another way, what Allott was claiming—and what is increasingly becoming accepted as a truism—is that had not loving behavior developed in humans as a natural behavior, humans would not be where they are today!

This is not to say that if humans engage in loving behavior, that behavior can be said to have a strictly genetic basis. For human development occurs not just because humans are endowed with a certain genetic makeup but because they are raised in a social setting. Indeed, the very structure that their brain develops is in part attributable to the social environment within which they develop. An environment, by the way, which—if absent—would mean the rapid death of virtually all human infants.

Although one cannot say at present that the development of loving behavior is well-understood, it *can* be said with confidence that a proclivity for such behavior developed in a “natural” way. Of course, “love” itself does not have a single meaning—for the sort of love one has for one’s mother is not the same sort of love that one has for one’s brother, or neighbor, etc.—or, for that matter, one’s *other* parent. Meaning that the processes that led to the development of *one* sort of love need not be the same as the processes associated with some other sort of love.

It may very well be that it is easier for a person to develop positive affect (love being an example) for members of one’s family than strangers. But insofar as this is the case, this difference does not have a genetic basis so much as it has a basis in the fact that one’s interactions are especially with relatives than with strangers (to make a trite—but nonetheless true—statement indeed!). However, we should keep in mind that our ability to *empathize* with others (the concept of empathy being related to that of love) does not appear to be related to biological relationship. For example, the reason we can refer to some movies as “tear jerkers” is that many, if not most, viewers are able to empathize with characters undergoing experiences that would make *them* cry. And our military leaders and media moguls are aware of this fact—which is why they have made such a great effort at hiding from us the horrors of the war that we have been perpetrating on the Iraqis: being either members of the elite or lackeys of the elite, they are benefiting financially from the war, and therefore do not want to see it end. (That it is destroying the very economy from which they are benefiting doesn’t seem to be a fact visible on their limited horizon.) They know that if the public were made aware of the atrocities that have been, and are, committed by our troops (and private security personnel), they would raise such an outcry that the politicians would be forced to listen to the public—for a change.

If one reason why loving behavior is not more common in our society is that we are not presented information—and especially images—which would “turn on” our empathy, and thereby motivate loving behavior in a Biblical sense, it is not the only reason. A number of additional factors could be cited, but I will limit myself here to what I regard as the fundamental factor.

²³⁴ And is available online at <http://www.percepp.com/lovempat.htm>.

I am among that group of thinkers that views the Agricultural Revolution, of millennia ago, as being the source of most of our problems today. This is, of course, a “contrarian” view but one, I believe, that has solid support. This is not the place to develop this point of view in detail, but suffice it to say that the primary “facts” behind this viewpoint are:

- Prior to the Agricultural Revolution there was concordance between human biology and the way of life being lived (a gatherer-hunter one—or “cynegetic” to use Paul Shepard’s term). That is the stimuli and behaviors for which humans had become “designed” by evolutionary processes were ones that the way of life provided. Because of this concordance, well-being was widespread; and although we might not be able to claim that loving behavior was common, we *can* with good reason state that its opposite was not common.
- With the Agricultural Revolution the way of life began changing, meaning that the stimuli received and behaviors engaged in by humans were also changing. Indeed, this change has accelerated since the Industrial Revolution of 250 years ago.
- Because human biology was not changing at a comparable pace, the stimuli to which humans were exposed and the behaviors which they were forced to engage in became increasingly “discrepant” relative to their “design specifications.”
- This increasing Discrepancy not only resulted in ill-being, but the ill-being precipitated, e.g., violent behavior—which resulted in *more* ill-being. Which Thus, the current mess of our society cannot be attributed solely to our president, for the roots of our problems go back millennia.

I will conclude by noting first that the origin of religion may very well have coincided with the development, by humans, of not only empathy for others in the group but for the prey species that were providing a significant amount of food to early humans. At some point humans, because they had started to feel empathy for prey species, felt a need to ask permission of animals to kill them for food, and ask forgiveness from them afterward for having killed them. These behaviors also became accompanied by rituals—and it is this ritualistic behavior which may have been the precursor to religion as we know it today.

The Agricultural Revolution, however, caused a change in the *character* of religion. In addition to the effects of that Revolution noted brief above, another effect was the rise of the prophetic tradition that gave rise to Hebrew Scripture—and the Christian Bible. For as certain sensitive individuals noticed the ill-being that was accompanying the rise of civilization, they attempted “restore” the situation of widespread well-being that had existed before. As I noted in “Worship,” there occurred preaching and law-making, etc.

Would that more in our midst understood what the Bible is *really* about! It might make a huge difference!

Why is Our “Christian” Society Anti-Jesuan?

James B. Gray

While attending an Easter service yesterday, my mind wandered to two gospel passages—neither of which was a part of the readings for the day. The first passage was Matthew 23, within which Matthew has Jesus blasting the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees; the second passage was John 11, which contains the shortest verse in the Bible, “Jesus wept” (v. 35).

Why did Jesus (in Matthew 23) express anger at the teachers of the Law and Pharisees—such that he felt it necessary to engage in a rather lengthy diatribe against them? They were, he asserted, according to Matthew, hypocrites who posed as experts on the Law, yet did not practice what they preached—and, indeed, taught a version of the Law that de-emphasized the heart of the Law, i.e., the passages that taught justice and mercy and honesty. “You hypocrites! You clean the outside of your cup and plate, while the inside is full of what you have gotten by violence and selfishness.” That is, the behavior and values of the individuals against which he was directing his tirade were anything but that which the Law enjoined.

What caused Jesus to weep in the John passage? Jesus had just learned of the death of his friend Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus saw Mary’s weeping, and the weeping of the people who were with him, and his heart was touched—“he was deeply moved,” in fact, and began weeping himself.

Seemingly, these two passages have little in common. Why, then, did these two passages come to my mind as I was in church today? The point that I would like to make here is that Jesus is commonly portrayed as mild manner—as one with, in fact, a somewhat bland personality. Yet these two passages portray Jesus as overcome with emotion—anger in the first instance, sadness in the second. And the passages depict Jesus as not only subject to the same emotions as we are; the two passages have in common that they reveal a Jesus whose orientation was to the well-being of his fellows. He was angry with the teachers of the Law and Pharisees because he knew that the orientation of the Law was to well-being (see my “[Worship](#)” for elucidation of this point), yet they were obscuring this fact from the people—in effect, thereby, blaspheming the Law. Given this why *wouldn’t* Jesus be angry?! And he wept at the death of his friend Lazarus because Lazarus had been a friend—and weeping is what one does under the circumstances.

Although the gospels do not record it, Jesus was likely also saddened, near the end of his ministry, by the fact that it was ending in failure—which it did, contrary to “the [alleged] Easter message.” Jesus had tried to call the attention of his fellows to the fact that the religious leaders of the society were promulgating an inverted—and therefore perverted—version of the Law; had tried to make his countrymen aware of the *true* Law (that one loves God by loving the neighbor); and had tried to “convert” his fellow Jews to the truth regarding the Law. But Jesus had failed. Despite this fact, the religious leaders of his society had perceived Jesus as a threat,²³⁵ and therefore developed a plan which eventuated in silencing Jesus.

²³⁵ Bruce Chilton has argued brilliantly in *The Temple of Jesus*, 1992, that there is good reason for

Or did it? Jesus's words (and deeds) were purportedly recorded in the gospels that appear in our Bibles. But two questions arise regarding those books:

- Do these four books give an accurate record of what Jesus said and did—so that the dozens of other books written during the early years of the movement were properly ignored, or declared heretical and, therefore, mostly destroyed?
- Insofar as these four books *do* provide a good basis for discerning the true nature of Jesus, are their contents—despite the diversity of those books—accurately presented in the churches?

I will not herein address the first question (a very interesting and relevant one, certainly) choosing, rather, to focus on the second one only. And the assertion that I would make regarding the Christian churches as they relate to the canonical gospels, is that were Jesus to attend virtually any Christian church today—whether at Easter, or any other time of the year—he would become both angry and saddened.

He would be angry at the fact that the values that “drive” our society—greed, materialism, and selfishness—are not ones that he would perceive as “of God,” yet the churches established in his name do, and have done, little to denounce those values. Rather, what the churches emphasize is correct belief (i.e., orthodoxy) and the participation in ritual; they do not ignore giving attention to the sorts of values associated with Jesus's ministry (i.e., “Jesuan” ones)—but merely give lip service to them. Which amounts to the same sort of hypocrisy that he accused the religious leaders of his time of engaging in. The complicity of the churches in giving support to our society's dominant values—with some churches going so far as doing so explicitly!—would not only make Jesus deeply angry at this blasphemy, but deeply saddened as well. For Jesus would realize that millions of Americans, over the years, have been in effect “brainwashed” into thinking that they were being sold the genuine article when in fact they have been sold a cheap, fraudulent substitute.

I'm not sure that Jesus would have taken the next step, and asked: *Why* is it that in this society the dominant values are greed (i.e., people are driven to acquire as much as possible), materialism (i.e., they are driven to acquire things), and selfishness (i.e., after they have acquired all they can, they are intent on keeping it for themselves)? But if he would not have asked that

believing that at some point Jesus began using bread and wine as sacrifice substitutes. Although Chilton does not carry his argument to its logical conclusion, I would add that if Jesus did this, this would seem to indicate that Jesus learned—perhaps from Essenes living in Jerusalem—near the end of his life, the Essene view that the High Priest was not legitimate. In learning this he concluded that Temple sacrifice lacked legitimacy, and that he needed, therefore, to cease participating in Temple sacrifices and instead institute a suitable substitute that would simultaneously not place a burden on his fellows. Jesus then “hit” on the idea of using bread and wine as substitutes for flesh and blood, and began promoting the practice of the sacramental use of bread and wine—outside the Temple. When the Temple authorities learned of this practice, they realized that they could not allow it to become widespread, because their livelihood depended on Temple sacrifice. (One is reminded here of the amusing story of Demetrius's reaction to Paul's preaching; Acts 19:21 – 41.) They therefore plotted to have Jesus killed, having the Romans do their dirty work for them—for reasons other than the real ones. (Reminds one of the current war in Iraq, doesn't it!)

question, I will—for I believe it to be an essential question. The basis for my saying that is that if one would like to see a “conversion” of our society from the dominant ones of greed, materialism, and selfishness to ones more decidedly “Jesuan,” one needs to address four questions:

- Why are those values the dominant ones in America?
- Given the reasons for their dominance, which of those factors are subject to change (and can therefore be thought of as “levers”), which not?
- Given the factors identified as subject to change, what specifically *can* be done to change them?
- Of actions that *can* be effectively engaged in, which ones *should* be?

It’s possible that if Jesus’s ministry, as recorded in the various gospels (canonical and otherwise), were analyzed carefully, one would conclude that implicitly he asked the above questions. But whether or not that might be the case, my concern here is with contemporary American society, not a society of 2,000 years ago; and although all four of the above questions warrant attention, I will restrict myself here to just the first one—and be deliberately brief.

It would seem that there are three possible answers to this question:

- People in general (not just Americans) are *born* with a strong tendency to be greedy, materialistic, and selfish; i.e., they are genetically “programmed” this way (which answer implies that a solution is not possible—short of changing “human nature”—so that it is foolish to even think about “reforming” Americans).
- People use their free will to *choose* to be this way (which suggests that the solution is to preach at those most responsible for the problem—i.e., the elite—the “solution” used by the prophets and Jesus—the implication here being that because the prophets and Jesus were failures, there is no point in attempting this “solution” either).
- Societal developments have been such as to prompt people to be this way—despite the fact that they are neither *programmed* to be this way, nor *want* to be this way (which implies that the answer lies in bringing about societal system change—which, in turn, raises two additional questions: (a) change in what direction? and (b) .how shall the change be brought about?).

In this essay I choose not to give attention to the first two explanations—primarily because I believe that they are of too little importance to merit attention. And although I will focus solely on the third explanation, even that one will receive but cursory attention below. Given this, I would mention three facts of the American experience as particularly decisive in explaining the current prominence of greed, materialism, and selfishness in our value system. Values that are particularly prominent in our elite—but because of that fact are also notably present in non-elite groups given that elite values have a tendency (in part because of elite promotion!) to spread through the rest of the population. The three facts:

- The fact that we are a nation of immigrants—with roots especially in Europe, Africa, and Asia.
- The frontier experience—which especially affected those of us whose ancestors came from northern Europe (given that that experience can be thought of as ending in the 1890s).
- Urbanization/industrialization—which experience affected especially those whose ancestors came from southern Europe and (more recently) Asia.

The immigrant experience—first given significant attention by Oscar Handlin in his classic *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, 1951—was one that removed people from a situation that was often rather miserable, but that provided some measure of security; provided them with a stressful and miserable journey to America (resulting in many deaths—especially in the case of slaves); and placed them in a situation of discrimination and maltreatment (especially with slaves, of course). The language barrier placed immigrants at a disadvantage, but the fact that many those who had come over “freely” had arrived with family members and village friends/acquaintances at least provided them with some sense of security—a sense denied, however, to slaves, who were often separated from family members. Basically, however, immigrants—whether free or slave—were “provided” with a sense of *estrangement* by their immigration experience (i.e., their trip over, along with their experiences as new citizens in this country), and that sense was transmitted to progeny—which helped prepare those progeny later to acquire the values of greed, materialism, and selfishness.

The frontier experiences (first given important attention by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”) affected primarily immigrants from northern Europe who came to this country in the middle and late nineteenth century. Turner claimed that that experience encouraged those involved in it to value conquest (initially of the environment—which needed to be “tamed”), invention, individualism, simplicity, and democracy. A value system that encouraged innovation (especially of a technological nature) and energetic activity—values further encouraged by the “Protestant ethic” which these immigrants may have brought over with them. These values, again although not themselves involving greed, materialism, and selfishness, contained the seeds of those values, and required only further societal development before “flowering” in the values of greed, materialism, and selfishness.

That further societal development I would identify as industrialization/urbanization—a development that especially impacted immigrants who came to this country from northern and southern Europe, and who settled in urban areas. Those from Europe who settled in rural areas (primarily from northern Europe) were not initially affected; nor were those who had been brought over as slaves (and were still associated primarily with the South). Asians may have been affected somewhat, but few of them were present in America a century ago—and the ones that *were* present were “shielded” somewhat from the effects of industrialization/urbanization by strong family ties.

A “classic” (if largely unknown) discussion of the effects of industrialization/urbanization the American value system was provided in Thorstein Veblen’s 1891 “Some Neglected Points in the

Theory of Socialism” (published in the *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*).²³⁶ This article was written at a time when industrialization/urbanization was well underway in America, Darwinian thinking (with, e.g., its “struggle for existence”) was in the air (and being applied in socio-political contexts), and socialism was a significant movement in the Western world, including in America. All three of these developments are reflected in Veblen’s article.

His starting assumption was that man²³⁷ has, and always has had, regard for “his good fame—to his standing in the esteem of his fellowmen. This characteristic he always has had, and no doubt always will have”—presumably because it is a trait rooted in our biological nature as humans. In the past, the people with whom one interacted were known to one; and because one had first-hand knowledge of their behavior, one could make judgment’s regarding their character from that knowledge. One had, i.e., a good basis for labeling another as honest, trustworthy, hard-working, skilled, kind, selfish, etc.

An industrial society, however, is one that typically has a settlement pattern featuring cities of varying sizes.²³⁸ The density of population in cities is such that one typically, during the course of a week, interacts not only with a large number of people, but people who mostly are strangers. Because of this fact, how is a city-dweller to satisfy his/her need for having a good reputation in the eyes of others?—given that “the existing organization of society does not in any way preeminently foster . . . [such a] line of development” [i.e., a reputation based on solid knowledge on the part of others].

Given that the opinion that others have of oneself cannot, in most cases, be based on their first-hand knowledge of oneself, the only avenue open to oneself is to seek economic success, and then display that success (Veblen’s famous “conspicuous consumption”). The urban environment, then, tends to precipitate a “struggle for respectability”²³⁹ on the part of its residents. A “struggle” that—as it manifests itself with clothing, e.g.—may result in a person choosing “to go ill-clad in order to be well dressed.” A “straining after economic respectability” that comes to result in “the struggle of each to possess more than his neighbor”

Veblen went on to note that this “struggle” was (a) inseparably related to the institution of private property; was (b) resulting in increased jealousy (feeding the socialist movement) and unrest; and (c) resulted in much wasteful production (i.e., goods that were not necessary to produce)—but these comments are all beside the point so far as the present discussion is concerned. The principal contribution of Veblen’s article was to provide a basis for explaining greedy behavior focused on the acquisition of material things. And given that it virtually follows

²³⁶ Available online at <http://de.geocities.com/veblenite/txt/neglect.txt>.

²³⁷ The article was written before the era of political correctness.

²³⁸ A *hierarchy* of cities, in fact—something that German geographer Walter Christaller was to theorize about several decades later.

²³⁹ A analog of Charles Darwin’s “struggle for existence,” with its “natural selection” (or “survival of the fittest,” a phrase Darwin borrowed from Herbert Spencer, and first used in the fifth edition of the *Origin of Species*).

that if one is driven by greed, one likely will also be selfish, in effect Veblen also provided an explanation for the selfishness component of our value system.

Veblen concluded his article by asserting: “With the abolition of private property, the characteristic of human nature which now finds its exercise in this form of emulation, should logically find exercise in other, perhaps nobler and socially more serviceable, activities; it is at any rate not easy to imagine it running into any line of action more futile or less worth of human effort.” A conclusion—the latter one—that I find easy to accept. Whether Veblen was correct in asserting that the abolition of private property would result in a change—for the better—of our society’s value system is more debatable. If by “private property” Veblen meant “privately-owned *real* property,” I tend to agree with Veblen. The problem, however, is developing an implementable plan for accomplishing such a change, one that would also involve the use of non-violent means. Veblen did not offer a solution to this problem, but neither has anyone else.

It may be, then, that we are “stuck” with a value system that is inherently anti-Jesuan—while being Christian. Unfortunately, Christian values—for what they’re worth—will likely lead us to the edge of the precipice, and then some. So that just as Jesus was crucified as a consequence of decisions by the religious leaders of his time, the human species may very well crucify itself—led by people attached to Christian values.

Greed and its Correlates

James B. Gray

Although my focus herein is on correlates of greed, it is necessary to note at the outset that “greed” most commonly occurs as the principal part of the word “greedy”—i.e., a label applied to a certain sort of behavior; and that the word has a negative connotation. That is, to label another’s behavior as “greedy” is to register disapproval of that behavior. To understand why “greedy” behavior is commonly so judged, we need first to define “greedy” and also identify the correlates of behavior commonly labeled as “greedy.”

“Greedy” behavior is behavior that, first, has a certain *goal* or *end*. “Goal” implies that the behavior is consciously chosen, “end” refers to the result or tendency of the behavior—and does not necessarily imply that the behavior is chosen. Rather, those who think in “end” terms might recognize that a behavior that begins as a consciously chosen one may, over time, “morph” into one that is merely habitual.

What goal/end is associated with greedy behavior? Stated abstractly, the end is some sort of *acquisition*. In our society that acquisition can be thought of as a two-stage process. The first stage involves acquiring as much money as possible—but not, usually, as an end in itself. (If the behavior is of that sort, we label the person involved as a “miser.”) It is usually assumed that the behaviors associated with the acquisition process will all be legal—but this assumption needs to be qualified in two ways. First, in some cases money is acquired by clearly illegal actions. Second, one may—as an individual, or representative of a large corporation—have the “clout” to force legislators to pass laws that will make certain behaviors legal—behaviors that *previously* were illegal (or at least commonly regarded as unethical), but ones that the individual/representative in question *wants* to engage in, and therefore wants to have made legal (to avoid litigation).

The sort of acquisition that is dominant, as a first step, then, in our society is the acquisition of money. Usually that acquisition is not an end in itself but done for the “purpose” of purchasing goods (and, in recent years, experiences—such as trips, visits to spas, skiing trips, etc.). And whether an effort of “conspicuous display” (Veblen) is involved, others typically become aware of the purchasing behavior of the “greedy” person in question.

Greedy behavior is correlated (we would assume—in the absence of substantiating empirical research) with certain behaviors/attitudes—on the part of both the greedy person in question and other people. Given that greedy behavior has the *end* of acquisition (money, then goods-experiences), and that certain *means* of necessity are associated with that end, the question arises: How should those means be characterized? In the absence of empirical findings²⁴⁰ to which I can refer here, I would guess that the following sorts of behaviors would be associated with greedy behavior: aggression, lying, back-stabbing (e.g., by spreading vicious rumors regarding perceived competitors), etc. That is, it would seem that various behaviors are associated with greedy behavior, all of them generally perceived negatively. If a person is perceived as hard-working (e.g., one who works intensely and/or for long hours), that person might also be

²⁴⁰ If there is relevant empirical research here, I am not aware of it.

perceived as greedy. But a person who is perceived as *primarily* a hard-working individual rarely, it would seem, is also thought of as a greedy person.

A second correlate of greediness is *selfishness*—in that one would expect a greedy person also to be a selfish person. “Selfishness” is a concept that pertains to the *disposition* of what one has: a selfish person keeps for himself (and family), an unselfish person shares what s/he has with others—an *altruistic* person being one to is unselfish to an unusual degree (in relative and/or absolute terms). I cannot cite empirical support for this assertion of a relationship between greediness and selfishness, but the relationship is a logical one: in is difficult to imagine a greedy person who would not also be selfish.

A third correlate of greediness is *unhappiness*. Again, I cannot refer to empirical research in support of my claim here, but relevant here is the simple, but revealing, research done several years ago by Bernard Rimland (a specialist in the study of autistic children) who undertook a simple study, with a large group of students, that found a close relationship between selfishness and happiness. Given that one would expect selfishness also to be related to greediness, I feel confident in stating that there is a strong positive correlation between greediness and unhappiness.²⁴¹

If person *X* is perceived by person *Y* as greedy, does this perception engender any particular attitudes and/or behaviors in *Y*? I would answer “Yes.” Referring first to attitudes that *Y* might have relative to *X*, the dominant attitude is likely to be disapproval—both as to the *end* of the greedy behavior and the *means* used by *X*. The end sought—perceived as a “drive” for *excessive* acquisition—is likely to be objected to, I would argue, for reasons that the objector is not even aware: The objector “knows,” at an unconscious level, that the “excessive” acquisition on the part of the greedy person impacts others—in that it helps drive up the price that others must pay for the things acquired. Because this excessive acquisition impacts others negatively (i.e., affects their well-being adversely), the objector perceives—correctly so—this behavior on the part of the greedy person as *unethical*. That is, it’s wrong because of what it does to other people.

A negative attitude toward the greedy person is likely also to be engendered by the *means* used by the greedy person to obtain his high income. Given that the behaviors involved may have involved cheating, lying, pushiness, back-stabbing, etc.—i.e., behaviors that directly impacted others negatively—those behaviors are likely also to be perceived as unethical. Thus, the greedy person is likely to engender in others a negative attitude because his behaviors are (rightly) perceived as unethical—i.e., as impacting negatively the well-being of others.

Because the greedy person’s behaviors are perceived (rightly) as unethical, those who object to that behavior likely would (a) like to see such behavior widely recognized as *unethical*, and also (b) as *illegal*—i.e., prosecutable. Given, however, the fact that those with power in our society tend to be greedy²⁴² (unless they have inherited their wealth—in which case not all may be),

²⁴¹ A cautionary note, however: Is unhappiness a result of greediness or, rather, is greediness a result of unhappiness?! The deficiency of Rimland’s research is that he *assumed* that unselfishness resulted in happiness, without rejecting—on the basis of careful empirical research—the hypothesis that happiness causes one to be unselfish.

²⁴² Most rich can be assumed to be greedy; it does not follow, however, that just because someone is greedy that they will be rich. The values associated with the elite (greed, materialism, and selfishness)

they cannot be expected to have pass laws that outlaw the behaviors they engage in. If anything, they use their influence to *legitimize* their behaviors. (Witness their efforts, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, to get corporations the status of “persons”—an effort that finally was successful in 1886—followed by the use of that status to allow corporations to gain a stranglehold on our society. (See, e.g., Thom Hartmann’s book on the subject: *Unequal Protection: The Rise of Corporate Dominance and the Theft of Human Rights*, 2004.)

If an objector to greediness has negative attitudes toward greedy people, what behaviors might s/he engage in in response to his/her attitudes? Likely there are some cases of people killing—or tying to—others whom they perceive as greedy—such cases likely especially where the killer has been hurt by the direct activities of the greedy one. More common, though, fortunately, are efforts to either *structure* situations so that greedy behavior cannot be damaging (see, e.g., James Madison’s *Federalist* No. 10 on this), or work on passing laws to make illegal the unethical behaviors associated with greediness. Unfortunately, in our society the fact that corporations have been given the status of persons has led them not only to come to dominate our economy, but political process as well—in effect making our Constitution a mere piece of paper. In addition, the actions taken by officials of the current national administration have only exacerbated the situation.

We seem to have reached a point such that we have crossed a certain threshold such that we *cannot* return. Let us hope that this is not the case—but I fear that it is.

can be expected to percolate downward—for Karl Marx stated, correctly, that the ruling ideas of a society are those of its ruling class—but although some near the bottom may acquire the basic values associated with the elite, the disadvantages they face as “lowers” (education, contacts, etc.) may prevent them from ever becoming rich.

The Good Samaritan Parable and Job

James B. Gray

For many years my favorite parable in the gospels has been that of the Good Samaritan. Over the years I have come to interpret the parable in a variety of ways; recently, it occurred to me that the parable could be thought of as a subtle commentary on the “Old Testament” book of Job. Here, then, are the views that I have developed regarding this matter.

First, some background: The institution of kingship apparently was introduced into Hebrew society around 1020 BCE, Saul being the first king. In 926 BCE, however, the kingdom was divided into a Northern Kingdom (Israel—with its *Israelites*), and a much smaller Southern Kingdom (Judah—with its *Jews*). Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BCE, and the Israelites were killed/scattered—so that they disappeared from history. Then in 586 BCE Judah fell to the Babylonians, and of those not killed, some (the “better” ones) were deported to Babylon. An edict of Cyrus II (“the Great”) in 537 BCE, however, permitted those Jews who wished to return to Palestine; some of them then did, and began a new phase of (now) *Jewish* history (there no longer being *Israelites*).

Although scholars differ in how they date the book of Job—some date it to the seventh century BCE, others as recently as the second century BCE—I will here follow Karen Armstrong in assuming that the book was written after the Exile (i.e., after 537 BCE), and was a revision of an older story.²⁴³ What I wish to emphasize in discussing the book is the fact that there are certain parallels between Job and the Good Samaritan parable, which parallels lead me to ask the question of whether or not the Jesus of the gospels in effect “trashed” Job in that famous parable. First, though, let me provide some additional background information.

One of the key concepts of Hebrew theology had been that of a Covenant—a contract between God and the Hebrews (as a *people*, not as individuals) to the effect that if the Hebrews followed God's commands, God would reward them. Actually, the Covenant can be thought of as especially being an agreement between God and the Hebrew *elite*; and we see the concept discussed best, perhaps, in the book of *Deuteronomy* (which book appears to have been Jesus's favorite Old Testament book).

While Israel (i.e., the Northern Kingdom) was being threatened by the Assyrians (and even before), prophets (including Amos, Hosea, Micah, and First Isaiah) arose, and attributed Israel's problems to the Israeli elite: problems were occurring (they asserted) not because God was failing the Israelites but, rather, because the Israelites (the elite in particular) were failing God—by not abiding by God's commandments. (It should be kept in mind that these commandments—except for the cultic ones—were not so much of a “religious” nature, but of a *social* nature—pertaining to one's duties to one's neighbors; see my “[Worship](#)”). Perhaps God was not directly *causing* Israel to have problems, but was at least *permitting* these problems—doing so as a

²⁴³ *A History of God*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, p. 65.

means of punishing Israel (i.e., the Israeli elite) for its disobedience, for not keeping its part of the Covenant.

Later, while Judah (i.e., the Southern Kingdom) was experiencing problems, prophets (e.g., Jeremiah and Ezekiel) arose in Judah, and offered much the same message. But with the fall of Judah, and subsequent deportation of “leading” members of Jewish society, the theological argument of the prophets—that the troubles of the Jews were attributable to sinfulness on the part of the people (elite in particular)—became not only *unpalatable*, but *unbelievable*. Some theological innovation was called for, else Judaism as a religion was in danger of being rejected by its adherents.²⁴⁴ Such innovation occurred (on the part of some of those returning from the Exile) with the writing of Ecclesiastes—and also (and, indeed, especially) Job.

The basic message of Job (as I see it) is that God's ways are not comprehensible to humans: God is a Mystery that²⁴⁵ cannot be grasped by mere mortals. Ostensibly it goes on (in the concluding verses) to argue that once one grasps (!) this, God will reward one—but I agree with those who believe that the ending to the book was tacked on later: certainly the ending is a “tacky” one, that cheapens the theology of the book. Rather, it seems to me that the book on the one hand—and very explicitly—argues for the grandeur (if incomprehensibility) of God. But, it seems to me, that the book also—in chapters 29 and 31 in particular—constitutes a partial updating of the (Deuteronomic) Law; at any rate, I agree with Charles Foster Kent that Job presents “the culminating Old Testament portrait of a social [elite] citizen.”²⁴⁶

There are certain parallels between Job and Jesus’s Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25 - 37), and this suggests two questions:

- Was the Good Samaritan parable a conscious attempt on the part of the gospel writer to update Job?
- Given that there are not only similarities between the two but important differences, did that writer wish not merely to update Job, but “trash” it?

Let us, then, attempt to answer these questions, beginning by noting similarities and differences between the two.

- Both are *stories*, not historical accounts. It is clear, I think, that when Luke has Jesus tell the parable of the Good Samaritan, he was having Jesus tell a story (a parable, in fact), and was not recounting an historical event—and that his readers of (or listeners to) his gospel knew this. Likely there are people (so-called “fundamentalists” in particular) who

²⁴⁴In a society based on business activity (i.e., the buying/selling/bartering of goods and services at the inter-family level) “religious” institutions must satisfy their “customers” just like other businesses—or face the prospect of “going out of business.”

²⁴⁵I deliberately eschew the use of the word “who” here.

²⁴⁶*The Social Teachings of the Prophets and Jesus*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917, p. 159.

view the book of Job as recounting real events (while recognizing that the Good Samaritan parable was “just” a story); but I don't think many scholars would accept this view—and neither do I.

- The two stories differ greatly in length: the Good Samaritan story is pithy, the book of Job goes on and on; the former is comparable to Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, the latter to Edward Everett's earlier (lengthy) speech on that occasion.
- Both have four principal *human* characters—Job with Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; the Good Samaritan story with the injured man, a priest, a Levite, and the Samaritan. In addition, however, Elihu plays an important role in the later chapters of *Job*, and robbers and an innkeeper have roles in the Good Samaritan parable.
- God is explicitly present in Job, but not the Good Samaritan story. One can, though, argue that God is *implicitly* present in the latter in that God was the author of the story—or at least approved it.
- The human characters in the two stories represent *classes* of people (even though they have names in Job). I perceive Job as representing the Jewish people in their travails, and the other human characters in the story as representing conventional Jewish theologians. In the Good Samaritan story I perceive the injured man as representing suffering people in general,²⁴⁷ the priest and Levite as representing “religious” (i.e., people who engage in devout observances as a occupation), and the Samaritan as representing what a truly religious person is—namely, a person who does what God wants, not simply one who has an office of some sort in a “religious” institution.
- Each story has a Suffering One.
- The *central* character in each story is different. In Job the central character is Job (or is it God? At any rate, both God and Job dominate that story.) In the Good Samaritan story I believe that it is the Samaritan who is clearly the dominant character. Again, though, one might argue that God, although only *implicitly* involved in the story, plays a key role in the Good Samaritan story; for it is God who implicitly provides primary direction in the life of the Samaritan—whether Jesus's fellow Jews want to recognize this or not. (Certainly most hearers of the story must have found it shocking, even on the verge of being blasphemous—assuming that it *was* actually told by Jesus.)

Thus, we can say that in Job a Suffering One is the central character (with God also prominently present), whereas in the Good Samaritan story it is someone who *comes to the assistance* of the Suffering One who is central (but with God likewise playing a prominent, if only implicit, role).

- The Suffering One in Job not only has a name, but is a “talking head.” In contrast, the

²⁴⁷Many scholars likely would argue that Jesus confined his ministry to fellow Jews, thus that the injured man should be thought of as representing a suffering Jew only.

Suffering One in the Good Samaritan story is nameless, faceless—and silent. Presumably, in fact, that Suffering One is *unable* to speak.

- Whereas Job is continually thinking (and talking) about his suffering, the nameless Suffering One of the Good Samaritan story presumably is *unable* to think—or think clearly—about his suffering. Therefore, we listeners/readers must think about his suffering *for* him.
- Job protests over and over again that he does not *deserve* to be suffering: after all, he has followed God's Law—and more. In the Good Samaritan parable the question never arises as to whether the Suffering One deserved to be set upon and injured. The focus of the story, rather, is on how one should *react* to a Suffering One that one chances upon (more broadly, a Suffering One of whom one becomes aware²⁴⁸): a Suffering One deserves our attention by virtue of being a Suffering One, period.
- The Good Samaritan parable does not address the question of *why* there is suffering—on the one hand suggesting thereby that we will never fully understand why “bad things happen to good people,” or even “bad” people, for that matter. But also suggesting that insofar as suffering exists, the point is not to *intellectualize* about it, but to do what one can (individually and collectively) to *alleviate* it. Job is concerned about suffering, but note that his obsession is with *his own* suffering, not that of others. In, e.g., Chapter 29 he lists his “good deeds,” and one would have to admit that ostensibly Job is an admirable person. But Job doesn't seem to *feel* the suffering of others; he doesn't seem to *empathize* with others. Job's orientation is to his own (undeserved) suffering, whereas the narrator of the Good Samaritan story (i.e., Jesus in the gospel) is trying to get the listener/reader to focus on the suffering of *others*—and the proper response to it.
- The climax of Job is an extended discussion—by God—of God; no such discussion occurs in the Good Samaritan story. Concerning the latter, it's as if God is a Mystery, so let's just leave it at that, and concentrate on what's pleasing to God: not just *thinking* about it, but (and especially) *doing*. One could almost say that if Job is a theological work, then the Good Samaritan story is *anti*-theological—close, indeed, to being Buddhist in orientation.²⁴⁹ It seems to me that the book of Ecclesiastes—although having similarities with the book of Job—is, nonetheless, very different from Job in that, like the Good Samaritan parable, it is basically anti-theological in orientation.

What does all of this add up to? It seems to me that the writer of *Luke* has Jesus saying in the Good Samaritan parable that if one is suffering, one should not be like Job and stew in one's

²⁴⁸In today's world, with the communications technology in existence, we have the capability of learning about suffering throughout the world—and learning about it quickly. (How accurate and “full” that information is, is another question, of course.)

²⁴⁹See, e.g., Raymond Panikkar's provocative “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81-99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

hurt—complaining that one does not deserve to be suffering (because one is, after all, a “good” person). This might be the “natural” thing to do, but one should strive to avoid this reaction. Rather, one should attempt to orient one’s thoughts, one’s life, to others (but not to the extent that one loses one’s own selfhood in the process). Not only will one thereby help to remove hurt in others, but one’s *own* hurt may be healed in the process. In addition, *self-actualization* may occur in the process as one develops—and finds in oneself—talents while working to minister to the needs of others (which sensing in oneself can give one a sense of well-being). Last but not least, one may find God, for one may learn that “God is love” (as I John 4:8 declares): rather than finding God by intellectualizing about God (as the writer of Job does), one should (Jesus was perhaps suggesting, as expressed by Luke) *find God by doing God’s will*. In doing so, indeed, one may arrive at a concept of God that deviates from the conventional one—e.g., in being beyond verbalization—but is infinitely more meaningful, because personal.

Job was a good person—and he certainly thought of himself as one! But perhaps that’s part of the problem: Job was not a very *humble* person, and he did good out of a sense of duty, not out of a genuine feeling of empathy for others. Job needed a certain attitude that permeated his very being; if he had had it, he would not only have been a truly good person, but would have discovered that Mystery we call God in the process. Note that what I am saying in effect is that the writer of Luke, in his Good Samaritan parable that he attributed to Jesus, is presenting a perspective closely related to the “thrust” of Deuteronomy.

Is this the sort of advice that we can live by in contemporary America? Certainly it is out of tune with the dominant ethos, but I find it of interest that several years ago psychologist Bernard Rimland,²⁵⁰ in a notable study of happiness, found that a higher proportion of other-oriented people tended to be happy than of self-oriented people. Thus, even though we are taught by some “scientists” (to use a kind label for Economists) that people are *naturally* selfish, and it is true that being other-oriented has little “success value” in our society, it is nevertheless true that a person who goes against the grain of our society in being other-oriented is more likely to be happy than a self-absorbed person. What’s interesting here, of course, is that the Jesus of the gospels (Luke in this particular case) seems to have not only internalized the law that one should love the neighbor, but seems to have acquired the insight that following this law should not be perceived merely as an *obligation*, but an *opportunity*—for *one’s own* well-being.

Was, then, the parable of the Good Samaritan included in Luke as a subtle critique of Job (to address the question that I posed at the beginning of this paper)? I believe that the parable is far too clever, brilliant to have been invented by the writer of Luke, so the question is whether the historical Jesus created the parable, and created it specifically to critique Job as against Deuteronomy. On the one hand, I am convinced that the historical Jesus did author the parable; and although I find it highly conceivable that Jesus intended the parable to be a commentary on Job, there is no way of establishing his intent in creating the parable.

²⁵⁰Bernard Rimland, “The Altruism Paradox,” *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 51 (1982), p. 522. Rimland was director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research. His primary finding of interest was that people who were labeled happy were also labeled unselfish. Thus, we have the irony that supposedly one gains happiness by giving primary attention to “Number 1”—but that relevant research provides no support whatsoever to this “priceless pearl of worldly wisdom.”

Jesus and Sports: A “March Madness” Sermon

James B. Gray

The conventional view regarding sports is that they provide entertainment and emotional release for spectators. And are even more advantageous to the athletes involved, for participation in sports gives them an opportunity to become and remain physically fit, to develop an attitude of “good sportsmanship,” to get “chicks,” to develop socialization skills (with members of the same sex)—to say nothing of developing “contacts” that may prove useful at a later point, and (in the case of professionals) an opportunity of (perhaps) making “big bucks.”

A less popular view of sports, however, is that they provide a diversion for spectators, and thereby serve the interests of the elite—with the athletes involved simply being pawns in a game being played by the elite. The Marxian view of this game, I suppose, is that sports divert people from recognizing that they are being exploited by the elite—that they are producing “surplus value” that is being expropriated by the elite. Whereas a more American view of the game is that sports divert people’s attention from their role as citizens—in that the time that people devote to sports spectatoritis would more profitably be spent discovering what was occurring in their society; not, of course, by attending to the distortions and lies purveyed by the mass media, but by reading more objective and responsible sources. And that because Americans fritter away their free time watching athletic events (among other diversions), they remain ignorant of what government officials and corporate executives are doing—and ignorant of that ignorance—which ignorance serves the interests of the elite.

A less commonly recognized function of sports in our society is that they are an important vehicle for preventing people from embracing “Jesuanism”—i.e., a religious perspective that can be said to have its basis in the ministry of Jesus. It’s true, of course, that there are organizations out there such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes which purport to advance the cause of Christianity. But that’s precisely the problem: in advancing the cause of Christianity, they fail to advance the cause of Jesuanism, for Christianity is by no means identical to Jesuanism. Rather, Christianity should be regarded as a domesticated version of Jesuanism—and thereby as not even a version of Jesuanism.

Christianity is most accurately regarded as a Hebraized version of paganism that developed during the first four centuries of the Common Era as a sort of pagan Mystery with Hebraic elements grafted onto it. A religion that may or may not have had a “genetic” relationship with the early “Jesus Movement” (e.g., scholar Burton Mack argues that the original “christ cult” emerged in northern Syria toward the middle of the first century CE from a Jesus movement group present there); but had little in the way of a *religious* relationship with the early Jesus Movement. For whereas the strands of the early Jesus Movement, although differing one from another, had in common an *orthopraxy* orientation, the “christ cults” that emerged developed an orientation to belief (*orthodoxy*, in fact) and cultic behavior.

If Christianity is characterized by an orientation to belief (including the recitation of creeds) and cultic behavior (e.g., various sacraments), how can Jesuanism be characterized? And why can it be said that sports are anti-Jesuan?

It may very well be that scholars (such as Bart D. Ehrman) are correct in arguing that the strand of early Jesuanism that best carried forth the ministry of Jesus was Ebionism. But that does not mean that we should think of the Ebionism of 2000 years ago as how we should think of a Jesuanism *relevant for today*. What I propose, rather, is that we use the “New Testament” as we know it today as the basis for defining Jesuanism—doing this despite the fact that that Testament was put together by Christians, not Jesuans! And that in so using the New Testament we take as most relevant those portions that are most distinctively Jewish—that “update” the Old Testament. And given that the distinctive feature of the Old Testament is its orientation to Law*i.e.*, rules for living attributed to God—we should scour the New Testament for rules for living.

In doing so a primary consideration to keep in mind is that the New Testament was put together hundreds years ago, and that not all of the rules presented therein should be regarded as relevant for today. What we need to look for in particular are *general* rules, and we find such especially in a passage in Matthew 25 and (indirectly) in Luke's Good Samaritan parable. The Matthew 25 passage refers to feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, attending to the sick, visiting those in prison, and being hospitable to the stranger. I understand this passage to be illustrative, rather than definitive, of what God wants of his creatures, the basic principle here being: “Insofar as you perceive ill-being in others (and humans in particular), do what you can to alleviate that ill-being.” I would add that in the twenty-first century we also need to be concerned not only with those others who are contemporaneous with us, but future generations as well (e.g., we need to be concerned with “global warming”).

Given what modern Jesuanism should entail, why say that sports are anti-Jesuan? To answer this question, we need to consider the nature of sports. And the starting point here is to recognize that the dominant concept associated with sports is that of *fairness*. The idea here is that certain rules have been established regarding any given sport, and that referees are retained to ensure that those rules are followed—*i.e.*, that fairness prevails. Given, then, that fairness prevails with any given sport, and that any sport involves competition with others (either other individuals or other teams), one is assured that the outcome of any given contest is such that the “best” individual or team prevails.

Assuming a team sport, the “best” team is thought of not so much as consisting of members who are superior genetically as, rather, individuals who have trained hard and studied intently, and who have generated an intense desire to win and have exerted a great deal of effort. In other words, although only *internal* factors are given a causal role, what is emphasized is that an exercise of “will” (manifested in various ways) on the part of team members is decisive in determining success and failure.

It's as if the neglect of *innate* attributes were done *deliberately*, to deny the role that they actually play. And why might that be? Because, I would argue, sports are promoted in our society by the elite because they are intended to serve the interests of the elite; sports exist to convey a certain message to our society's members (“inmates” might be a more apt label). What is that message? That just as fairness prevails in the realm of sports, so does fairness prevail in the Larger Society. And not only is a “factual” claim thereby made very subtly; so is a *values* claim: justice is the ultimate good.

Should we accept that values claim (one made so subtly that few notice it being made)? That is, would a Jesuan accept the proposition that *justice* is the ultimate good? Let us examine this claim in the context of the working of our society.

We can say that “justice” exists in a society if everyone gets what one deserves. This leaves us with the question of how to determine what any given person deserves, and in our society we answer this *not* by arguing that everyone deserves the same amount, or that people deserve on the basis of need, but that what one deserves is a function of what s/he *contributes*. Now that, in turn, leaves us with the question: How to determine what a given person contributes? And commonly this question is answered by using *inferential reasoning*: given that one’s income is a function of one’s contribution (it is tacitly assumed), one can infer the magnitude of one’s contribution from the magnitude of one’s income.

If we assume that fairness prevails in our society (and further assume that it prevails because government acts as a “referee” to ensure that fairness prevails—government’s primary function, other than providing for the country’s defense, being, domestically, to ensure that fairness prevails); then it follows that everyone is receiving in accord with magnitude of contribution. And it further follows, that since even those who have little are receiving in accord with their (minimal) contribution, there is no justification for rendering any sort of assistance to those with little. After all, given that success is not so much a matter of genetic inheritance or even a contextual factor such as one’s family environment but, rather, a function of how hard one has prepared oneself, etc. (i.e., “will-power”), if one is at the bottom, one has only oneself to blame. The analogy of sports with society (an analogy made tacitly) means that one can *neglect* the neighbor in good conscience. The ideology of our society does not prevent one from being a *Christian*, but certainly does not favor one being a *Jesuan*. In fact, it gives one a “solid” basis for *not* being a Jesuan—and thinking that being a “good Christian” is, though, equivalent to being a good Jesuan.

There is more to the sports analogy than this, however. Team sports have much more prestige in our society than do individuals sports, and again there is good reason for this: they serve the elite’s interests more than do individual sports. Just as each member of a team plays a different role on the team, this prepares one to think that there is a certain niche in society for oneself—and that one ought not aspire to any other position (especially one that might threaten the elite!). Given that there is a certain importance associated with one’s position, one should expect compensation based on that degree of importance—but also accept the “fact” that how well one is compensated reflects, in fact, one’s degree of importance. And just as a sports team needs a leader, and a certain hierarchy of command (from coach to assistant coach, to quarterback, to safety, to water boy, etc.—in the case of football), the same is needed in the Larger Society.

Although there is competition for positions on a team, this competition is such as to ensure that the most qualified person gets to occupy any given position. Once positions are filled, there is no longer intra-team competition and, rather, members of the team cooperate one with another—under appropriate leadership—to win in competition against other teams. In carrying over this fact to the real world, and applying it to the Larger Society, one “learns” from sports that our society is in competition with other societies: that’s just how it is. Given such a view of how our society relates to other societies, it is not surprising that we so often adopt a belligerent

attitude relative to other societies, and involve ourselves in armed conflict with other countries (our current involvement in Iraq being but one example).

It is also not surprising that an authoritarian personality is favored by the intellectual environment that prevails in our society. Regarding this, I read recently that there is evidence that the more authoritarian one is in one's outlook, the less capable one tends to be in making correct inferences. That is, a cognitive trait seems to be empirically linked to a personality one—a most interesting empirical finding (given the “reasons” for our current involvement in Iraq)! I would suggest that a (if not the) reason for this is that given that we are bombarded with all sorts of conflicting “facts,” such that it is difficult to make reasonable inferences. If one has difficulty doing this, and senses that s/he does, one may not only begin to think in black/white terms to gain some degree of psychological comfort, but may become vociferously attached to such a stance.

Jesus and Socrates

James B. Gray

Several months ago I started to re-read Plato's *Apology*, and was struck (at the time) by how Jesus-like Socrates seemed. Recently, however, I began to re-evaluate my perception of Socrates, as a result of developing—and applying—a particular “normative framework” to both Jesus and Socrates. The “framework” to which I am referring centers of “interactional style,” the “dimensions” of which can be thought of as follows:

- A. Public speaking (one-way communication to a crowd)
 - 1. Lecture/sermon
 - 2. Parable-telling
- B. Speaking to others in a small group
 - 1. Giving information/instructions to others; input of those others limited to asking questions to clarify. (A hierarchy of a superior and inferiors.)
 - 2. Speaking to others, receiving feedback (comments, questions, etc.) from others, those others treated as equals.
- C. One-on-one communication
 - 1. Conversation between two equals, with the topic of conversation constantly shifting, each participant taking the initiative a different times.
 - 2. One individual conveying information/ideas/instructions to the other (a superior to an inferior, such as a parent to a child or a master to a slave).
 - 3. The parties to the communication are unequals, but the intent of the “superior” is to:
 - a. Draw out the other person (assumed to be shy or “possessed” by a sense of inferiority), to help make that person lose his or her shyness and/or sense of inferiority. There may or may not be the hope that the other will come to think highly of one, and become one's friend.
 - b. Pull thoughts out of the other to help that person see the logical inconsistencies in his/her thinking, thereby helping that person develop a more logically consistent worldview.

When I think of Jesus and Socrates using the above classification as my lens, I place Socrates in the C.3.b. category, and *only* in that category (except that often he was dealing with several others, not just one). Jesus, on the other hand, I don't see in that category at all. I do, however, see him in C.3.a, and would argue that Robert C. Leslie, the author of *Jesus and Logotherapy*

(1968), also saw Jesus that way. (If anything, Leslie made the mistake of thinking of Jesus *solely* in terms of that category.)

Basically, however, I see Jesus in categories A.1. (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount) and A.2., but also in B.1., and even B.2. at times (“who do people say I am?”). And what I find most interesting about Jesus is the fact that he was a parable-teller.

A parable is a puzzle, and therefore encourages the hearer to tease out a meaning. The teller of parables assumes (tacitly, at least) that the hearers are all different (in inherited, acquired, and chosen traits), and that therefore each hearer will interpret a given parable differently. Thus, it must be that the speaker has chosen to teach via the parable because s/he *wants* each hearer to interpret the parable in his or her own way.

If that were all there is to parable-telling, there would be little reason to get very excited about parable-telling and parable-tellers. But the fact that a parable is a puzzle suggests not only that a hearer is forced to grapple with a parable s/he has heard, is forced to tease out a meaning (for him/her, for that given point in time). It also suggests that a given hearer will be motivated to talk to other hearers to find out how *they* interpret the parable. Again, I assume that the teller of parables *anticipates* this, and that this may in fact be the *primary* reason s/he chooses to speak in parables: s/he *wants* people to interact with others intellectually and to, in fact, develop certain (a) attitudes and (b) habits of behavior as a *consequence* of such interaction.

If one has heard a parable, and wishes to communicate with another hearer regarding the parable, most likely one’s motivation is not to convey *one’s own* interpretation to the other, but to find out how the *other* interprets the parable. That is, even though one has oneself developed a tentative interpretation of the parable, one wants to ‘feel out’ others who have heard the parable regarding its possible meaning. One may, on the one hand, hope that one’s own tentative interpretation is confirmed by the other. But, on the other hand, one would expect that the other would have a somewhat different interpretation. One is hoping to take one’s own tentative interpretation in conjunction with the (tentative) interpretation of another(s) to arrive at a more meaningful interpretation of the parable.

In arriving at a more satisfying (e.g., complete) interpretation, one may be tempted to now believe that one has the “true” meaning of the parable. If, however, one reflects on the matter only slightly, one will come to realize that the other hearers are “in the same boat” as oneself; and that given this, one’s “true” interpretation is not likely to coincide with the “true” interpretation of any other hearer. On the one hand, this should make one doubt that one has the complete truth regarding the meaning of the parable—or any other parable, or And such an attitude should motivate one to want to find out what others think, so that one can develop a still more mature interpretation of the parable in question—a still more mature worldview, in fact. On the other hand, recognition of the fact that others have different views (views that are *different*, but not thereby *inferior*, *wrong*) should not only have the effect of lessening the confidence in one’s own views. It should lessen one’s *investment* in one’s own views, so that one is more open to the ideas of others, and will more readily change one’s mind without feeling that one is somehow betraying oneself, being a hypocrite. And the whole concept of “losing face” will recede into the background.

If one has only a limited investment in one's interpretation of a given parable (in one's beliefs in general), one will not only welcome the ideas of others. By interacting with others intellectually, one will learn to value others *as people*. One will learn to tolerate others, and will even learn to *love* them. Thus, interacting with others will not only result in spiritual maturation for oneself. It will positively affect one's attitudes toward others, and therefore one's behavior relative to others.

It is, of course, true that in seeking out others to learn their interpretation, one will find that not only do others have different interpretations. They also will react differently to one's overtures. Some will not want to interact, so that they prevent meaningful conversation from occurring. Some will already have formulated an interpretation of the parable, and will only want to impose their interpretation on oneself—so that again no meaningful conversation occurs. But there will be a third group consisting of members like oneself, who are likewise open to discussion with oneself regarding how to interpret the parable—willing to treat you as an equal, neither a superior nor an inferior; willing to engage in back-and-forth discussion, in a joint effort to wrest meaning from the parable in question. One can have real conversations with such people, and will even tend to form an interaction group(s) with such people—i.e., a group(s) that meets on a regular basis. It would be wonderful if one could interact positively with everyone. The unfortunate fact, however, is that not everyone is willing to interact with you—or do so as an equal: our society in no way encourages such behavior—quite the opposite, in fact. Thus, the most that one can do regarding such people is interact with them superficially, but try not to close the door entirely with them.

The point here, however, is that parable-telling can have benefits beyond “mere” intellectual ones (a point I develop more fully in my [“Worship”](#)), so that the “ministry” of Jesus (to use an anachronistic term) was potentially of much more value than that of Socrates. For in using parables to convey ideas, Jesus was not only doing that, but was using an interactional style “designed” to result in behaviors that would promote the very behavioral tendency (i.e., the habit of loving the neighbor) that he was preaching. That is, if the hearers of his parables responded to them as he hoped they would, they would internalize his teachings whether they *chose* to or not! I'm not convinced that one can attribute the same sophistication to Socrates's teaching style. Socrates can be regarded as typically Greek, in that his orientation was to *truth*; Jesus, on the other hand, was a true representative of Hebrew thinking and had an orientation, rather, to *well-being*.

There is potentially a huge difference in these two approaches, for an orientation to “truth” can easily be accompanied by an attitude of intolerance, and cruel “conversionary” behavior aimed at getting the dolts who don't know the “truth” to get to know it—whether they want to or not. An orientation to well-being, rather, gives primacy to the personhood of each and every individual, granting to others the right to believe what *they* believe to be “true”—thereby recognizing that loving others involves not just “ministering” to their physical needs, but granting their freedom in their thinking.

Unfortunately, the Jesus movement that “won out” in the early centuries of the Common Era—i.e., Orthodoxy—although claiming to continue the ministry of Jesus, decidedly did not. Its orientation was not to well-being but, rather, to truth; it is not surprising, then, that intolerance became a notable characteristic of Christianity (beginning about 300 CE). In acquiring that

characteristic, it turned Jesus=s ministry on its head—for if one is so certain of the rightness of one=s thinking that one is willing to persecute, and even kill, those who have contrary views, then Well, need I say more?

The Love Command: Further Thoughts

James B. Gray

For a number of years now the following question has been uppermost in my mind: Given that Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States, and that the central teaching of the putative founder of the religion is that one should love the neighbor (indeed, that one loves God by loving the neighbor), why is it that Christianity emphasizes correct *belief* (i.e., orthodoxy) rather than *behavior* in accord with the love command? At times, over the years, I have come to believe that I have found at least a part of the answer to that question. But I have yet to sense that I have obtained the complete answer to the question—and, in fact, doubt that I ever will. Still, I keep searching for a more complete answer, and am excited when I encounter a book or article that stimulates me to further develop my thinking about the matter.

Such occurred recently while surfing the internet for a review of a book that I had just ordered on early nineteenth-century naturalists. I “chanced” (?) across “[Ethical Implications](#) of the Laws of Pattern Abundance Distribution” by Stephen R. P. Malloy and Jeffrey A. Lockwood—which pointed out that scientists have, at times, argued that “laws” that they have supposedly found in the human realm should be interpreted as indicating what *should* be. That is, scientists have at times made the argument that a lawful “is” can be regarded as a guide to what “ought” to be.

Such an argument can be convincing. What, then, is the basis for accusing the argument of committing the “naturalistic fallacy”? Do Malloy and Lockwood present a convincing argument that exposes the fallacy of such an argument? I agree with Malloy and Lockwood that knowledge about (lawful) “is” can help us decide what *can* be done; and that what *should* be done is necessarily limited by the options of what *can* be done. But, personally, I am not convinced that they succeed in presenting an argument that satisfactorily disposes of the claim that “is” should be regarded as the basic guide to “ought.”

In sensing that I was not finding their presentation entirely satisfying, I was prompted to see what *I* could do in providing a better answer—one which would simultaneously give me more insight on the question that I raised in the first paragraph above. And as I let my unconscious mind grapple with the matter last night while sleeping, I was “given” an answer that I do find—at the moment, at least—rather satisfying. My purpose here, then, is to present that answer, formulating it as well as I can while writing “off the top of my head” this morning.

My starting point is the assertion—one that I believe to have a rather sound basis—that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago the way(s) of life that humans had was concordant with their biological nature. Given this, one might say that they had a way(s) of life that was in accord with “human nature”—i.e., was “natural.” With the Agricultural Revolution, however, ways of life began to change—slowly at first, but at an accelerating rate especially after the Industrial Revolution of 250 years ago. While ways of life were changing, human biology was remaining basically unchanged, however; as David P. Barash has put it, there occurred the “hare” of way-of-life change combined with the “tortoise” of human biology relative fixity. The direct result of this uneven (to say the least!) change was a growing “discrepancy”—best conceived as a growing discrepancy between way of life *lived* and way of life “*designed for*” (as

a result of the operation of various selection mechanisms—such as sexual selection, and *not*, I cannot emphasize too strongly, Darwinian “natural selection”).

I strongly believe not only that the prophetic movement was precipitated by this growing discrepancy (the goal of the prophets being restoration of a more “natural” way of life)—which I comment further on later; but that virtually all of the problems that humans have faced over the centuries are rooted in this discrepancy. Given this latter belief, the question arises: Why is not such a belief widespread?

The quick answer to that question is that although various scholars have undertaken research that provides evidence in support of that thesis, two problems are associated with that evidence. First, that evidence is not well-known—because it has not been well-publicized (by the media, by university professors in their teaching, etc.). And second, no scholar has yet developed a comprehensive body of evidence in support of the thesis.

These facts lead us to the question: Why do these deficiencies exist in the research supportive of this thesis? And here, it seems to me, the answer again lies in developments associated with the Agricultural Revolution; thus, let me explain myself here.

One of the most important developments that occurred in conjunction with the period of the Agricultural Revolution was the development of *social classes*. Some differentiation had existed within human groups prior to this Revolution: certain functions tended to be associated with adult females, certain other functions with adult males; and, one’s role within a group tended to change as one became older. But *social classes* were unknown with humans until the Agricultural Revolution got underway. Not only did social classes emerge, but class membership became a basically hereditary matter: one tended to remain a member of the social class into which one was born.

Class societies have, of course, varied greatly in their specific characteristics through history, but what they have in common is that upper classes are always parasitical and predatory with reference to lower classes. This is not to say, of course, that the upper classes in all societies have been, and are, equally exploitative: e.g., during Jesus’s time “honor” was highly prized within Roman society, and members of the upper classes even competed one with another for honor—doing so by trying to outdo others in beneficence directed toward “lowers.” Still, the generalization is true that the “office” (as Thorstein Veblen would put it) of those in the upper classes of a society is to “live off” those occupying lower positions.

Despite this fact, it is also a fact that the exploitative function of the upper classes typically is not at all well-understood *within* any given class society. Quite the contrary, indeed! Why hasn’t *this* fact been recognized as such? The answer is that as social class systems were developing, so was *ideology*—the function of ideology being to provide intellectual support to the Existing Order. The *content* of ideology has, of course, changed greatly over historical time—in part reflecting the fact that the nature of elites has changed historically. What’s interesting about ideology viewed historically, however, is the important role that the “God” construct has played in ideologies.

Ideology seems to have first appeared on the scene with the rise of the institution of kingship—the original “myth” created being that the king was an *agent* of God, this myth later developed such that the king *was* a god. Given that (as Karl Marx astutely observed) the ruling ideas of a society are those of its ruling class, if the elite of a society promotes the myth that its members partake of divinity in some sense, and this myth “catches on” (which it likely will), the Existing Order will be sanctified as expressing God’s will. As such, who would think of disturbing that Order? Given that such disturbance is rare, the result is a (relatively) stable society (the rise of a Spartacus type of person being rather rare).

After Jesus’s death, in the early years of the Common Era, a number of Jesus movements arose, but the one that became successful was one that had little bearing on Jesus’s ministry—and may not even have had a genetic connection with the disciples that Jesus attracted (despite claims by the Roman Catholic church to the contrary). It became successful, not because it had authenticity relative to Jesus’s ministry but, rather, because (a) it had developed a theology which, drawing its basic ideas from pagan Mystery religions, made it familiar (if not attractive) to “gentiles,” and (b) the emperor Constantine supported its development—and in 380 CE the emperor Theodosius made it the official religion of the Roman Empire (so that one had better “convert” to Christianity, or else . . .).

Christianity, in this “successful” form, made an ideological claim not unlike the “divine right of kings” doctrine that had been common before. It claimed that Jesus was a god—the one and only son of God, in fact—and that Jesus, prior to his death (and alleged resurrection, then ascension), had passed his authority along to the disciple Peter who, in turn passed it along to . . ., etc. So that the current Roman Catholic pope, although not a divine Being, ostensibly derives his authority from a line of succession leading back to Jesus—and, ultimately, God Himself (or is it *Herself*?!).

This ideology enabled popes, and others with high positions in the Church, to rule for a long period (with occasional disturbances—the Montanists being a notable early example)—until, in fact, the rise of nationalism, with its associated rise of secular leaders to positions of power, enabled a challenge to that authority. As the rise of secular leaders was occurring, again the “divine right of kings” doctrine was “resurrected” to provide intellectual support for *their* position in society. (Armies are useful, of course, but ideology is even more useful—because it enables rule without the use of much external force. For the way ideologies “work” is that they become *internalized*—meaning that people accept the ideas contained in an ideology and thereby in effect *rule themselves*.)

The struggle between Church and State in Europe occurred over a rather long period of time, and can perhaps be thought of as not coming to a close until the Renaissance (with the Reformation basically just increasing the number of Churchly centers of power). The challenge represented by the Renaissance had a secular basis in that it “raised up” Reason as a source of authority: one should believe what was reasonable to believe rather than what someone in authority *told* one to believe. What’s particularly interesting regarding the Renaissance is that its thrust was such that, in paving the way to the Enlightenment, it not only provided a basis for questioning the authority of the Church(es) but lent support to the development (during the Enlightenment) of more egalitarian ideas—most notably the idea of “natural” rights. An idea that was initially applied only to certain segments of society, but over time became more and more universalized. (I might

add that we are fortunate that our Founding Fathers were living at a time when there was somewhat of an egalitarian thrust to the secular thinking of the time.)

The rise of rational thought initially involved the use of logic, but became joined by an increasing amount of attention to empirical research—this development attributable perhaps especially to Francis Bacon (and even Roger Bacon earlier). *That* development, unfortunately, with its search for lawfulness in nature, inadvertently opened the door for ideology once more—enabling a reversal in any trends in the direction of increasing egalitarianism.

The first major “advance” on this new front was Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, a work that is best regarded as one that took (unbeknownst to Smith?) the physical “laws” of Isaac Newton and applied them to the social realm. Smith argued that certain forces were operating in the economy which tended to bring well-being to everyone—if, that is, these forces were allowed to operate without interference. From whence would interference possibly come? From government—hence the use of the term *laissez-faire* to refer to an economic system within which government basically adopted a “hands off” approach. Smith himself was by no means an anti-government sort of person, but his book gave those who *did* have such a mentality a basis for arguing that a “hands off” policy by government serves the interests of all. The Great Depression of the 1930s, e.g., should provide sufficient evidence of the fallacy of such a position, but *laissez-faire* thinking is still with us. However, this not so much because it has a solid empirical basis but, rather, because of the lack of a well-developed alternative.

Laissez-faire thinking recognizes that a social class hierarchy will develop, and adds that this is to be expected: A *laissez-faire* system, if operating without interference, will, the theory goes, enable *justice* to be realized. That is, one will be rewarded on the basis of desert: the more one deserves, the more one will receive. Conversely, the more one receives, the more one deserves—for the latter can be inferred from the former, given the first-stated relationship. What determines desert? The more one contributes to the society, the more one deserves. And how does one measure the “contribution” of a given person? Initially it was argued that the harder one worked, the more one contributed (Smith’s labor theory of value—to be supplanted later by supply/demand theory). But as the elite came to realize that such a “theory” did not fit their needs (given that their “contribution” was primarily of a negative nature!—and they could not fool themselves about this), they began to promote the idea that “contribution” could—and should—be inferred from income! A sleight of hand on their part that, they hoped, would not be noticed by non-elite members of the society. (And they were basically correct about this!)

Further ammunition was added to the elite’s cause by Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection—which he presented as a virtual law of nature. A “law” which, in his *The Origin of Species* (1859), he discussed in the context of non-human species, but with the implication that it applied with humans as well. (To be fair, in his later *The Descent of Man* Darwin gave sexual selection a significant role.) Darwin cannot be credited with originating *Social Darwinism*, but it must be admitted that that theory has its *basis* in Darwin’s theory of natural selection. For natural selection theory asserts that (a) excess births are the rule in nature (an idea drawn from Rev. Thomas Malthus), (b) given that there is such a thing as “carrying capacity,” not all individuals of a species that are born *can* survive, (c) intraspecific competition inevitably therefore occurs, (d) that competition results in those individuals surviving who are best equipped, by nature, to win in this competition, (e) this process occurring year after year results

in a slow, steady, progressive increase in the attribute(s) that confers survival advantage in competition with one's fellows (along with any other attributes that, by chance, are correlated with those "survival" attributes).

Social Darwinian theory, with its "survival of the fittest" phrase (drawn from Herbert Spencer), contends that this principle operated throughout nature, including within the human realm. And that in the latter realm it meant—using a sleight of hand here—that *success* (rather than survival *per se*) indicated fitness. There was no pretense here that survivors were ones who *contributed* most to the society, just that they had attributes—ones with a biological basis—that enabled them to achieve their success. Because it was "natural" attributes that explained their success, one could think of the class system that existed as expressing the operation of natural factors; and *that*, in turn, implied a certain inevitability regarding the Existing Order—one that it thereby would be *foolish* to try to change, and therefore that attempts *should* not be made to change it.

"God" was evidently conceived, by Darwin, as primarily, if not solely, a Creator; and because his evolutionary thinking could not admit of "special creation," "God" therefore played no role in Darwin's evolutionary thought (except for political reasons). Given this, the ideology of Social Darwinism was also godless in its youth. However, some thinkers began to think of Social Darwinism more in terms of the lawfulness associated with it, so that they could then not only think of the Existing Order as natural, but as in accord with God's wishes—given that the laws of nature had been established by God. Once this development occurred, people such as (Baptist) John D. Rockefeller could be Social Darwinists who also taught Sunday School!

It is interesting, then, that in the history of ideology "God" (or gods) has (have) played an important role in supporting the Existing Order—whatever it happens to be at the time. However, as I noted earlier, the Agricultural Revolution, with its beginnings of the "discrepancy," also gave rise to a prophetic movement—the portion of which that is most familiar to us being that which is presented in Hebrew Scripture and the "Old Testament" of the Christian Bible. What was notable about this movement is that (a) it occurred during a time of kings, (b) the prophets directed their comments at royalty, and (c) the basic thrust of their argument was that the *one God* was the *true King*, and that *His Law* is what should govern the society—the "message" of that Law being that the elite was not to exploit others but, rather, had an obligation to *do* for them (see my "[Worship](#)" on this site). Unfortunately, the anti-ideological perspective of the prophets never "took root" to any significant degree—and certainly has never been a significant part of Christianity (except to a degree during the "social gospel" period or a century and more ago). Meaning—to allude now to my original question—that the "love of neighbor" command has never played a central role within Christianity.

The fact that Christianity has done a poor job of continuing the prophetic tradition does not mean, however, that that tradition died long ago. The tradition has, in fact continued since Bible times but—ironically—primarily in the "secular" realm. Granted that many of those who have continued the tradition—such as Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, and Thorstein Veblen—have not looked (or claimed to) God as the "author" of their ideas. Their *orientation*, however, has been to human well-being—which is why it is proper to place them in the prophetic tradition. Besides, their choosing to work outside the "religious" realm can be interpreted, in part, as an indication of their disgust with conventional religion for its traitorous neglect of the prophetic tradition.

At present, the “God” construct plays little role in rationalizing the Existing Order, but as the Halloy-Lockwood article cited at the beginning indicates, the notion of *lawfulness* is, rather, used for that purpose—the argument being that what “is” can, and should, guide our “ought” thinking and, therefore, our behavior. I stated earlier that I did not think that Halloy and Lockwood did a satisfactory job of disposing of this idea—of demonstrating that the “naturalistic fallacy” is an actual fallacy. Let me now present an argument that, in my mind, *does* enable us to reject this view of “ought.”

If we think of the way of life lived by people in the period prior to the Agricultural (AR) Revolution as “natural,” and also perceive that a “discrepancy” began to develop with—and especially *after*—the Agricultural Revolution, it follows that it is an error to view human life since that time as “natural.” Therefore, any empirical regularities that are discovered with humans during post-AR times are not descriptions of what’s “natural” for humans. Rather, the benchmark for deciding what’s “natural” for humans is the period prior to the AR.

Therefore, any “ought” arguments that argue from “is” to “ought,” but do so on the basis of post-AR times are using an inappropriate benchmark, and should therefore be rejected out of hand. This does not mean that arguments based on “facts” pertaining to pre-AR times should, though, be accepted at face value, without evaluation. One should keep in mind that most in our society are “possessed” by the ruling ideology (one supportive of the Existing Order), and this includes scholars; and that insofar as scholars are “possessed” by the ruling ideology, they may be prone to interpret pre-AR times through the lens of the ruling ideology. Some such scholars—perhaps the majority, even—perceive with an ideological bias, and are unaware of that fact. But other scholars warrant the label “prostitutes” because they have sold their souls to a Foundation or Institute established with the specific purpose of producing “research” in support of the Existing Order.

Would it be helpful to The Cause that the “discrepancy” concept be better developed, and then publicized? Perhaps—but, then, perhaps not. I say the latter because it is to be expected that if this perspective on historical development were further developed, and then publicized extensively, the elite would (rightly) recognize such developments as a threat. The elite would then, one would reasonably expect, direct its lackeys in Foundations, Institutes—and universities—to “refute” the developing ideas and findings. The elite might even use character assassination—and *actual* assassinations—to nip such a development in the bud.

Rather than working on the development and publicizing of “discrepancy” ideas, I suggest that we recognize that insofar as societal system change has resulted from conscious efforts to bring it about, this has occurred via the actions of a small “vanguard” group. Therefore, those of us interested in advancing the cause—i.e., the prophetic movement—are perhaps better advised to *act* on our ideas rather than take the first-mentioned course. Being sure, it goes without saying, to act in a non-violent manner that evinces wisdom.

A Classification of Reasons

James B. Gray

The orientation of psychologists is to explaining behavior—on the basis of biological inheritance, early childhood experiences, and/or current socio-cultural context. For some of us raised in Christianity, however, the question of relevance is not why people *behave* in a certain way but, rather, why they *fail* to. Specifically, we are interested in the question: Why is it that given that Jesus's primary directive was to love the neighbor (*thereby* loving God), and that Christianity is supposedly based on Jesus's ministry; why is it that given these facts, loving behavior (relative, e.g., to *competitive* behavior) plays such a minor role in this avowedly "Christian" society? (A question that one could raise whether a USan, a Canadian, a Scots, an Italian, etc.)

There *are* answers to this question, but my purpose here is not so much to discuss those answers in detail as to present a *classification of reasons* why such behavior is not more common, and make a few general comments about each category. The basic breakdown in my classification of reasons is that (a) some in our society(ies) are not *inclined* to behave in this way (except in certain realms of life, perhaps), whereas (b) others are so inclined, but *fail* to do so (to any significant extent, at least) for a variety of reasons.

I should add that one does not create such a classification as a mere intellectual exercise. The value of such a classification is that it helps identify what needs to be addressed if we are to have a society within which loving behavior, in its various manifestations, is commonplace. Surely everyone, except the sadists in our midst, would like to see the emergence of such a society! Given this, the more comprehensive a classification we can create, the more likely we will be successful in creating such a society. Not that that's all we need to accomplish this objective, of course; but a comprehensive classification *can* play an important role in achieving this goal. Likely I have missed some important categories in the classification I present below, but this is the best I could come up with at the moment.

Let me begin my discussion of categories of reasons, then, by beginning with those in our society who are disinclined to give attention to the love command.

Those who are in this category can (as a general rule) be put into three categories: those who (a) argue that loving behavior is unnatural, (b) are in effect "possessed" by an "idea set"—such as an ideology—that provides them with "good" reasons for avoiding such behavior, and (c) consciously believe that certain types of people do not warrant loving behavior directed at them. It should be obvious that a person in any one of these categories receives no support whatsoever for their failure from Jesus's Good Samaritan parable. But, then, for those who claim no relationship to the Tradition of which Jesus was a part, *that* fact is beside the point. My interest here, however, is not so much with those who reject that Tradition but, rather, with those who claim membership in it. Given this, what can be said, briefly, about people in these three categories?

The view that *unloving* behavior is natural and, therefore, excusable, has been with Christianity for centuries, perhaps going back to Augustine of Hippo (and even Paul, perhaps). That is, the

(supposed) Original Sin committed way back when by a lady named “Eve” somehow (against all known laws of heredity!) taints us all; so that from birth on we simply can’t help being unloving creatures most of the time. Sociobiologists (such as E. O. Wilson), in recent years, ostensibly have provided scientific support for this viewpoint. But, fortunately, the reasoning of such people has since been demonstrated as based on false assumptions; so that Frans de Waal and other scientists, through their empirical and theoretical work, have thoroughly demolished that viewpoint. It is perhaps worth adding that after the publication (1859) of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, the “law” of intraspecific competition (i.e., thoroughly *unloving* behavior) was preached by scientists and others (including Baptist Sunday school teacher John D. Rockefeller!). But that Russian geographer-prince Peter Kropotkin countered this thesis on the basis of his own contrary research in *Mutual Aid* (1902). The fact that his research findings were basically ignored until recently simply demonstrates the power of the elite to have research that does not meet its needs suppressed.

A second reason why people are disinclined to make the love command central to their lives is that there are various “idea sets” out there—some, but not all, properly labeled as ideologies—that permeate the air we breathe, and therefore render it commonplace that the thinking of many will be guided, unconsciously, by those ideas. For example, *laissez faire* thinking has been with us at least since the time of Adam Smith; and because that theory teaches that people in a society receive in proportion to what they *deserve* to receive, it follows that there is no need to do for, e.g., the poor—because, after all, they are poor because they deserve to be. Therefore, one is justified in ignoring Jesus’s love the neighbor command—despite the fact that one belongs to a “Christian” denomination.

A third factor that disinclines some to withhold love from *certain* others, at least, is that they “know” that certain others do not *warrant* their love. For example, they “know” on the basis of certain Bible verses that homosexuality is wrong, and “know” (using their “common sense,” I guess) that people *choose* homosexuality over heterosexuality. It follows logically, in their minds, that it would be wrong for them to exhibit any sort of loving behavior against these evil people. What they fail to recognize—and likely would fail to accept even if informed on the matter—is that the *forms* that homosexuality took in Biblical times have little, if anything, in common with the forms that it takes today; so that their failure to contextualize the Bible amounts to treating it in a disrespectful—irreverent!—way.

The second category of those who do not make the love command central to their lives are those who may accept the command intellectually, but are inhibited from following it for one (or a combination) of several reasons—the first being, ironically, that the Bible provides little guidance regarding what *specifically* one should do that would be loving! There is, of course, the concrete example provided in Jesus’s Good Samaritan parable, but this parable is not much help as a guide—and neither are other Biblical passages. For example, Paul, in his famous discussion of love in I Corinthians 13:4 – 8 states that love is patient, kind, not jealous/conceited/proud/ill-mannered/selfish/irritable, does not keep a record of wrongs, is not happy with evil, is happy with the truth, never gives up, and its faith, hope, and patience never fail. But because this passage on an abstraction is filled with other abstractions, it provides little in the way of guidance. Besides, its focus is on what love is *not* rather than what it *is*!

A second (and closely related) reason why those who may be inclined to live by the love command don't is that not only do they find little helpful guidance in the Bible, but find that even their "common sense" is not very helpful. Especially may they be perplexed as to what to do, specifically, relative to certain categories of other people that would exemplify lovingness. For example, given that men are from Mars and women from Venus, how does a man demonstrate love for his wife, and the converse? Especially if what is *intended* as an act of love is not so interpreted—so that the negative feedback one receives simply heightens the barrier between oneself and one's spouse. Similarly, how does one express love toward someone with a different ethnic and/or cultural background? Etc. Differences between people—whether based in biological inheritance or whatever—present barriers to understanding, and those barriers are not necessarily easy to overcome. Therefore, even though one may have a desire to express loving behavior toward another, one's inability to determine what would *constitute* loving behavior may very well inhibit one from engaging in behavior that one might perceive as loving.

A third reason that people in our society may not engage in loving behavior is that they are unable to *perceive* others "out there" in need of love. A variety of factors may explain this, one important one being a failure on the part of the media to provide people with relevant information. After all, news that doesn't serve the interests of the corporations that provide sponsorship to media outlets is, by their conception of news, not news. Another reason of importance, of course, is the more down-to-home one that residential segregation on economic, ethnic, and racial bases is a commonplace in our society—so that one does not readily obtain information about others outside one's own neighborhood. Except, of course, the "bad press" given, e.g., people in inner city areas. The Samaritan in the Good Samaritan parable physically encountered a person needing help. Many of us today, in contrast, neither physically encounter others in need nor even encounter such others on TV.

Fourth, *busyness* is a characteristic of our way of life: we spend an inordinate amount of time getting to and from work, working, shopping for groceries and other items . . . we are so busy that not only do we lack time to find out about neediness that might exist around us, but lack time to do anything about any neediness that we *do* find out about. We may be able to find time to write a check to help support some cause that comes to our attention via the mail or TV, but we lack time to become more *actively* involved in addressing the neediness of others.

Fifth, even if we *do* have the time, we may not have the *energy* to do much. After putting up with the frustrations of traffic jams on one's way home from work, one may simply want to have a meal and then spend the remaining portion of one's evening resting—e.g., by watching TV. After all, one's energy is not limitless, and one *does* need to "rest up" so that one can face the challenges of the next day.

But watching TV, sixth, can further detract from one's becoming involved in engaging in behavior in accord with the love command because the exposure that one thereby gains to *advertising* simply feeds one's desire to acquire ever more things. Not only does the shopping for things involve the use of time that could otherwise be used for doing for others; putting those things together, and then using them involves still more time. There is enough pressure as it is in our society to "keep up with the Joneses." Advertising simply adds to that pressure—thereby reducing the likelihood that one will engage in behavior that accords with the love command,

even if one sincerely believes that such behavior is what one should spend more time engaging in.

Finally, some engage in little loving behavior because of being handicapped, ill, or poor. We can, of course, excuse such people for their lack—because they are precisely the sort of people that *we* should be directing loving people toward, not the opposite. Ironically, however, it often seems to be the case that it is precisely *such* people—i.e., the people toward which we others should be directing our love—that most *want* to engage in loving acts!

I wish I could cite figures that would indicate how many people are in each of these various categories, but so far as I know, none are available. Which fact is ironic, given the multitude of “Christian” colleges and universities in this society. One would think that social science researchers at such institutions would, by now, have produced mounds of research findings relative to the practicalities of living in accord with Jesus’s command. But they haven’t—and don’t hold your breath in the expectation that they shortly will begin so to do! Such research would be helpful to those of us who would like to see emerge societies within which loving behavior was more commonplace; and although researchers in “Christian” institutions certainly have the ability to provide us with useful research findings, evidently their commitment is to a “brand” of Christianity that places little if any emphasis on Jesus’s teachings. How interesting! And how unfortunate!

Orientation Systems—Biblical and Otherwise

James B. Gray

We all live in the same world, yet in an important sense we don't. For each of us has a unique "orientation system": each of us has certain unique thought processes and behavior patterns, and these provide our lives with a certain unique orientation. And the term "system" is appropriate here for whereas one's thought processes affect one's behavior patterns, the reverse is also true. I deliberately say "affect" here (rather than "cause") for the simple reason that factors *other* than one's thought processes also affect one's behavior patterns, and factors besides one's behavior patterns affect one's thought processes.

Although it is strictly true that each of us has a unique orientation system, it is also true that these various unique orientation systems can be grouped into a fairly small number of categories. There is, of course, no one "correct" way of grouping these systems, so that the typology of orientation systems that I use for the ensuing presentation has no claims of being "objective." Still, for my purposes, it is a typology that I regard as adequate.

What are my purposes? In my "[Worship](#)" and other essays on this site, I have attempted to write from the standpoint of a certain consistent perspective—one that I would label as a *moralistic orientation system (MOS)*. Indeed, I would go further and assert that it is a moralistic orientation system that has been strongly influenced by my interpretation of the Bible's "thrust." Undoubtedly my MOS has also been influenced by the fact that I grew up in the Middle West (but have also lived elsewhere—from North Carolina to Oregon); I would, however, like to think that my MOS has especially been shaped by (a) my exposure to the Bible, (b) my reading of books and articles pertaining to the Bible, and (c) my exposure to several Christian denominations.

As to my purposes, they relate to my MOS. My "Worship" paper indicates (a) that I perceive the Bible to be basically "about" human well-being; (b) that I perceive a well-being Tradition in history that began prior to Bible times; (c) was shaped significantly by many of the characters in the Bible; and (d) has continued down to the present day—but especially outside the churches! I see it as important to become a part of that Tradition (not just *students* of it)—and this means developing it *today* in a manner that is *relevant* for today. In doing the latter, I have concluded that (a) a concern for human well-being must, today, be supplemented with a concern for human survival ("global warming" being the especially important threat facing us at the moment); and that (b) the problems we face will only be solved via societal system change—not technological "fixes."

How to bring about societal system change? In "Worship" I propose the New Word Fellowship as—among other things—a vehicle for bringing about such change. But how to get others to adopt that new institution? My answer to *that* question is, first, that one must publicize the concept of the New Word Fellowship—which I have done through sending the paper to Bruce Robinson of this site, and Mr. Robinson's kindly choosing to place the paper on this site. Second, though, one must gain an understanding of the facts (a) *that* there are many orientation systems "out there" besides by particular MOS one (including different MOSes—if you will pardon the allusion to the Biblical Moses!), (b) that it would be wise to learn *what* other

orientation systems exist, and (c) also be advisable to acquire ideas as to the reasons *why* they exist. For, if one is to convert others to one's way of thinking, it is essential that one gain some understanding of "where they're coming from," so far as orientation systems are concerned.

This, then, is the basis for the present essay. Below I primarily identify and make some comments regarding the various orientation systems that I perceive in our society, and then conclude by identifying, and making a few comments regarding, the factors that might help us explain why different people have different orientation systems. I conclude by using that discussion to further solidify my assertion that societal system change is necessary.

As a final introductory note I would call the reader's attention to the fact that in "Worship" I point out (in referring to Peter Gomes's *The Good Book*) that numerous interpretations can be—and have been—given to the Bible, so that I cannot claim that my interpretation is the objectively "true" one. Still, I believe that my interpretation of the Bible's "thrust" (one which holds that the passage in Job 29 that begins with verse 12 contains the "heart" of the Bible's message) has authenticity, and I am unapologetic in using it as the basis for my conception of the moralistic orientation system (MOS).

At the moment I perceive four primary orientation systems present in this society in addition to the MOS one, so that the five such systems given attention below are:

- Moralistic
- Pietistic
- Acquisitive
- Elegant living
- Creative

I should note perhaps that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

1. Moralistic Orientation System (MOS)

For people in this category thought processes are dominated by a commitment to the (Biblical) "love the neighbor" command. And given that their thought processes focus especially on this value, their commitment to this value "pulls" their behavior in that direction. This may mean that they are drawn to certain professions—such as social work or psychological counseling. It may mean becoming involved in activist efforts to develop and implement governmental and/or private programs to help those in need. It may mean spending "off" time working in a food pantry, a soup kitchen, or an outdoor ministry. It may mean undertaking research regarding social problems, and publicizing the results of one's research. It may mean donating sums of money to causes that one deems worthwhile. Etc. The point is that a harmony develops between one's thoughts and one's actions; one engages in actions that are related to one's abilities, interests, and financial-time resources, and as one engages in those activities, one's thought processes are further developed.

One's commitment to the "love of neighbor" command, in dominating one's thinking and in guiding one's behavior also, of course, influences one's value judgments. Indeed, a MOS person may very well tend to be a "judgmental" person in that s/he not only applies value judgments to oneself but to others—and particularly to others in positions of public trust, such as politicians, corporate executives, religious leaders, etc. Being judgmental does not, of course, make MOS people unique; MOS persons are, however, distinguished other judgmental people in that the basis of their judgments is the love-of-neighbor command rather than the narrow criteria used by "conservative" Christians. Indeed, for MOS persons "conservative Christian" is an oxymoron.

2. *Pietistic Orientation System*

A "pious" person is one who is religious, but in a very formalistic sense. What attracts a pious person to a religion is its *cultic* aspects. Such a person believes, evidently, that by attending to the cultic aspects of a religion—such as sacrifice in centuries past, or the panoply of church attendance, participation in rituals during church services, Bible study, saying "grace" before meals, and offering prayers (petitionary especially?)—one is attending to the needs of one's soul; and, as a consequence, will experience a blessed afterlife upon departing this world. A pious person may give some attention to ethical matters, but tends to interpret "being good" as pertaining especially to living a "clean" life (e.g., refraining from cursing, drinking, doing drugs, etc.) rather than doing for others. And insofar as the pious person *does* attend to the needs of others, this tends to be not out of a genuine feeling of empathy for others but, rather, out of a sense of duty. A sense of duty, in fact, that is defined in very narrow terms.

A pious person thinks of him- or herself as "religious"—and, indeed, the prevailing view in our society of what constitutes a "religious" person is one that tends rather closely to approximate the concept of piety that I have given above. However, what the pious person—and most others—fail to recognize is that the Bible confers little if any respect on such people. Indeed, the Biblical view (as I perceive it) is that piety, rather than being the *heart* of religion, is a *substitute* for it! That this fact is not widely recognized in our society is a commentary on the pitiable condition of Christianity in our society.

3. *Acquisitive Orientation System*

This is an extremely common orientation system in our society, and is therefore (unsurprisingly) a multi-faceted one. The orientation system is manifested in several principal ways, the ones given attention here being:

- Things
- Skills
- Personal attributes
- Experiences
- Societal position

Let me, then, make a few comments under each of these five categories.

Those whose acquisitive orientation is focused on *things* have a fixation on acquiring material things (usually for the purpose of what Thorstein Veblen called “conspicuous display”), but usually this does not involve *valuing* things. For if one truly valued the things one acquired, one would not so readily abandon what one has acquired for the “latest and greatest”—which behavior is typical of people in this subcategory. True, there is a special subsubcategory of people who are collectors (of coins, stamps, old cars—you name it), and will part with their collections only “until death do us part.” But the typical person with an acquisitive orientation likes to amass any many things as s/he can afford, only to replace what has been acquired when the new model appears on the market.

Another subsubcategory here is the person whose obsession is with acquiring as large a bank account as possible. Such a person will, of course, use some of the money acquired to purchase things. Such a person may, in fact, live lavishly. But even when able to so live, the person will continue to accumulate money. In doing the latter, the person puts oneself in an excellent position to do for others, but selfishness tends to be one of the hallmarks of those with a fixation on acquiring things. (There I go—being judgmental!) Not only does a person in this subcategory tend not to do directly for others; their actions in acquiring money—whether for its own sake or for buying things—tend to have societal implications in that they may tend to drive prices up, thereby penalizing those lacking in monetary resources even more than they already are—being, though, oblivious to the impacts of their actions on others. This latter fact should not at all be regarded as surprising given that one with an orientation to things is highly unlikely to have any interest in others—outside his/her own immediate family.

A second subcategory of those with an acquisitive orientation is people oriented to the development of certain *skills*. In some cases the motive may be the development of certain skills for their own sake, but more commonly the motive is the development of a skill that will enable the person to use the skill as a source of income and fame. If the person, in developing and utilizing the skill, is able to acquire a substantial income, that income will be used to acquire things, of course. But more important than income *per se*, and the things that it can enable one to acquire, is the desire for fame—i.e., the desire to be recognized by others, thought of by others as a “star.”

The skills sought by members of our society are especially in the realm of sports, music, and acting. And insofar as one is successful in developing one’s skills to the point where one becomes reasonably wealthy, one may or may not use that wealth to do for others. Actors tend to be more sensitive than others, and it is therefore unsurprising that many actors (and some musicians), after attaining some degree of success, establish funds for helping others. And athletes—especially ones who have emerged from the ghetto—often maintain a relationship with the ‘hoods from which they came, and devote considerable portions of their earnings to those “left behind” (no allusion here intended to a certain despicable collection of books!).

A third subcategory under the acquisitive orientation system category is people whose orientation is to the acquisition of *personal attributes*—such as greater attractiveness, more youthfulness, becoming “cultivated” in one’s manners, knowledge (including of trivia), etc. Such people are obviously self-centered, and would not, therefore, be expected to have concern

for others. The exception might be those (e.g., actors) whose “looks” are important for their career.

Fourth, there are those whose orientation is to having *experiences*. This can include experiences in nature—as with rock climbing, cave exploring, or simply taking hikes. It can involve having sexual experiences with others (a desire that may be “driven” more by a need for dominating than by a desire for sexual activity *per se*). It can involve becoming obsessed with traveling. Etc. But what these various kinds of experiences have in common is that they reflect an orientation to selfishness, not *selflessness*.

Finally, for some the object of their acquisitive orientation is *societal position*. That is, they want celebrity (i.e., simply to be in the public eye—even if it means being celebrated only because they are celebrated!). Or they want simply power (and are therefore drawn to a corporate hierarchy). Or they want power combined with celebrity (and therefore become politicians). Or want status with reference to those whom they perceive as “society” people. Etc. In some cases the motive for wanting to attain a position of power is to enable them to do for others by getting certain laws passed and programs established. Usually, however, the motivation for attaining societal position is to satisfy ego needs—with no interest at all in using a high position, once attained, to address the needs of others.

4. *Elegant Living Orientation System*

This is a tendency that afflicts few in our society (fortunately!), and is one that *can* afflict only those in the society with considerable wealth. Indeed, it likely especially is associated with those with *inherited* wealth who were raised in privilege and “bred” to believe that they are special people who deserve to occupy the upper echelons of the society. Being wealthy, and having obtained that wealth through inheritance, they have developed nothing in the way of a work ethic—because they have never worked. And because they need not engage in the bother of working for a living (unlike the rest of us), they have little to do with their time except to buy things and live “in style.” Like their acquisitive cousins they *do* acquire things; but they do so for the purpose of enabling them to live “well”—and are not obsessed with the matter of having the newest things on the market. Indeed, having old things fits in better with their lifestyle—such as having paintings by the old masters on their walls, expensive antique furniture, and the like.

The lives of such people are occupied with parties with their “peers,” outings with such people (e.g., to the race track or polo matches), and charity balls. The latter indicates that they are not entirely self-centered; yet their charity balls are motivated more by need to have an excuse for socializing (and “showing off” in the process) than genuine concern for the putative beneficiaries of their balls. (What balls these people have!)

5. *Creative Orientation System*

Finally, a few in our society have an orientation to *creative* activities. In many cases the creative endeavor is pursued during “off” time—such as the orchestra player who composes during “free” time, the carpenter who whittles figures during spare time, the real estate agent who paints landscape scenes while not working, etc. In some such cases the creative activity is simply an

outlet from the humdrum of everyday life, with no thought that the product of the creative effort might eventually enable the person to engage in the activity full time. In other cases, however, the “drive” to create is so strong that the individual is willing to be engaged in menial full-time work until his/her creative efforts are noticed sufficiently to enable the person to engage in the activity full time.

The one occupation where people are *hired* on the basis of their (ostensible) ability to creative work is academia, where—and especially in the “better” colleges/universities—one is expected to engage in creative research for advancement, and even retention, purposes. In other words, in the “better” institutions of higher learning a “publish or perish” situation exists. Unfortunately, the existence of such pressure has resulted, as one might expect, in the proliferation of journals within which scholars can publish. Which means, in practical terms, that a great many articles get published that either evince little creativity or evidence creativity in an area of little concern to the general public—and, besides, do not constitute any sort of contribution to knowledge (or, at least, knowledge worth having).

What is especially troubling about scholarly research is that research undertaken by scholars at colleges/universities associated with Christian denominations tends to be as secular as that done at, e.g., state universities (such as the University of Michigan, University of North Carolina, etc.). One would think that, e.g., sociologists at such institutions would, by now, have thoroughly explored the question of why Jesus’s love-of-neighbor command is given so little heed in our society. But if such research has been undertaken, and been published, it has been carefully hidden from public view; at least such research has not reached my little corner of the world.

If one *does* have a genuine talent for creative work—whether composing music or undertaking research—one has little choice but to follow one’s muse. Thus, if creative people tend not to evince much concern for the lives of others, the fact of their “possession” by the creative muse offers them an excuse. Some, however, have been given a brand of creativity that causes them to develop ideas specifically of a societal nature, and we can feel fortunate that we are blessed with such individuals. I am thinking here especially of individuals who have offered penetrating critiques of society (such as Thorstein Veblen, Maurice Stein, and John Kenneth Galbraith) and those who have offered ideas relative to how society might and should be (e.g., the authors of the numerous “utopian” novels that were written and published in the nineteenth century).

6. *Conclusions*

How does one explain the presence of these various orientation systems in our society? Given that I am writing this essay as one who believes that a moralistic orientation system (MOS) *should* prevail in our society (after all, it *is* ostensibly a Christian one), my real questions here are:

- Why is MOS *not* the prevailing one in our society?
- Why, rather, are the other orientation systems prevalent?

In a sense, there is just one question here (the second one), and a useful starting point in providing an answer to the question is to identify possible explanatory arguments:

- We are genetically programmed in such a way that we are “pushed” into one of a variety of orientation systems other than MOS.
- Biology has nothing to do with it. Rather, the sort of upbringing that is common in our society is such as to give the inmates of the society one of a variety of orientation systems other than MOS.
- Biology and upbringing are not relevant as factors; rather, the orientation system that a person has is one that that person has *chosen* to have.
- Since the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago human ways of life have been changing (at an accelerating rate, at that), whereas our biology has remained basically unchanged. Given that prior to the Agricultural Revolution we humans had become “designed” (via the operation of various selection mechanisms) for a rather different way of life than the one that our society now imposes upon us, there is a “discrepancy” between what we have and what we are “designed” for (and therefore what we *should* have, some would argue). This “discrepancy” has had a multitude of consequences (many of which are not even known yet), an important one being that it causes many in our society to engage in *compensatory* behavior. (I prefer “substitutionary,” given that “compensatory” behavior rarely does the job of actually compensating for what’s missing.) Given that people differ one from another genetically, have had different life experiences, and have different current contexts, it follows that (a) people will vary in the *degree* to which they need to engage in compensatory behavior (and therefore do) and (b) different people will engage in different *kinds* of compensatory behaviors. In so doing, the various orientation systems identified above come into existence.

As I am convinced that only the final explanation has merit, I will not even bother formally to reject the first three—and will simply ignore them. In justifying my commitment to the fourth explanation I would begin by noting that as far back as a 1910 [article](#) by Thorstein Veblen, it has been recognized that humans have a positive “human nature”—which fact is masked by the fact that since the Agricultural Revolution humans have been forced to have lives contrary to their biologically-based “design specifications.” The facts that this positive human nature is not entirely evident now, along with the fact that various orientation systems *other than* MOS prevail now can be attributed to the fact of a growing “discrepancy” since the Agricultural Revolution—this giving rise to “compensatory” behavior. And the existence of such behavior explains not only the fact that our true nature as humans is not abundantly evident at present, but the fact that a number of non-MOSes are dominant in the society.

Insofar as this answer has merit—and I’m convinced that it has *substantial* merit—the suggestion, note, is that our societal problems (including the threat posed by “global warming”) will only be solved by way of societal system change. How to bring that about? *My* hope lies in my proposal, in “Worship,” to create New Word Fellowships. As I point out in that essay, a number of different consequences can be associated with participation in the sessions associated

with this institution—including ideas relative to societal system change. Come to think of it, *that* may be the most important benefit the Fellowship has to offer!

In closing, let me note that some might believe that a far more detailed explanation of our predicament than the one I have offered here should be developed. I, however, disagree with that viewpoint. Given that the explanation that I have offered—although sketchy—enables one to conclude that societal system change is necessary, it should be clear that efforts would best be directed at arriving at answers as to how to bring about societal system change rather than attempting to development a more elaborate explanation. The view has been inculcated in us that to fix a problem we must first understand it, and understand it thoroughly. What that “theory” ignores, however, is that creativity is more important for solving problems than knowledge. Developing knowledge provides employment for scholars, but does not necessarily contribute substantially—relative to creativity—to problem solution.

The Modern Prophet

James B. Gray

The prophets of the Bible (including Jesus) had an orientation to the well-being of their fellows, believing that the solution to the ill-being problem in their society lay in getting the elite to assume responsibility for the unfortunate in their society. Although their efforts were admittedly futile, their legacy should not be forgotten—for these men (they *were* all males) exhibited a high degree of creativity in their attempts to transform the thinking of the elite of their society. (See my [“Worship”](#) on this matter.)

But what should we take from that legacy? An orientation to the ill-being of our fellows? The conclusion that the ill-being problem, if it is to be solved at all, must primarily involve actions by members of the elite? The creativity exhibited by the prophets?

The ill-being problem is still with us—on a massive scale, in fact; thus, it still warrants attention. However, a new problem has entered the picture, and we ignore that problem at our peril—the problem of “global warming.” It would seem, then, that the ideal solution would be one that addressed both of these problems simultaneously.

But what is that solution? And after we have discovered (or invented?!) that solution, should we look to the elite as potential “saviors”? My answer to this latter question is: If we are *foolish* we will: members of the elite evince little or no evidence that they have an interest to “lead us out of the wilderness.” In a very real sense members of the elite can be “credited” with all of the problems we humans face at present; after all, what makes a ruling elite a ruling elite is that their decisions are the principal factor explaining why things are as they are—and throughout the world now. But just because members of the elite are ultimately responsible for all of our problems; and just because the “global warming” problem may eventuate the extinction of our species before this century is out—with members of the elite being included; it does not follow from these facts that the elite has the wisdom to see the “handwriting on the wall” and act in a manner that will be “salvific”—whether interpreted in short-run (i.e., ill-being) or long-run (i.e., survival) terms.

If, in arriving at a solution to our problems—whatever that solution might be—we eschew efforts to convince members of the elite to accept that solution, and then act on it, what alternative do we have? If we lack confidence in the elite’s successful tackling of our problems (based on the failure of the Biblical prophets), what is the alternate choice? *Is* there, in fact, an alternative?

It seems to me that if we regard it as foolish to look to the elite for leadership, and also recognize that the elite—or a portion of it—“runs” this world, the question that comes to the fore is: Is it possible for one to escape the clutches of the elite? For (a) if there *is* a way to liberate oneself from the control that the elite exerts over oneself (if ever so subtly); (b) some individuals/families achieve such liberation; and (c) those individuals who do become liberated make a concerted effort to help others gain their liberty, (d) the growth of that mass would act as a “cancer” on the elite-dominated Existing Order, and (e) eventually bring it down.

How to gain that liberty? Several years ago Eugene Linden (in *Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies*, 1979, p. 176). made the brilliant—and utterly correct—statement that the only real threat to the American economy is self-sufficiency.” Today we might well change “American economy” to “world economy.”

But how to *implement* this brilliant insight? When Linden used the term “self-sufficiency” I assume that he did not mean that he was advocating that *households* become self-sufficient: (a) it would be extremely difficult for a household to become self-sufficient; (b) even if a household could, the standard of living attainable would be so low as to make this option highly unattractive—meaning that virtually no one would pursue this option.

Linden did not clarify what he meant by “self-sufficiency,” but it seems obvious that he was not referring to *household* self-sufficiency. Which, then, leaves *community* or *regional* self-sufficiency as alternate meanings that we can attribute to Linden. And given this, it would seem that the better choice is *community* self-sufficiency. For given that a community would have fewer people than a region, and it is easier to get a small group of people to work together than a large group, it would be easier establishing a (relatively) self-sufficient community than a comparable region.

In addition, there’s the possibility of establishing a fairly high standard of living in a self-sufficient community—meaning that such communities could be made attractive enough actually to lure people from the Larger Society. Three problems would exist however:

- How to convince people to make an exodus from their current way of life to a rather different one?—one likely considerably less materialistic in orientation.
- How to get this process of community-building underway?
- How to undertake the process in a way as to escape the notice of the elite?—which in becoming aware of such a process, would be able easily to squash it.

Rather than providing answers to these questions here, let me simply state that I’m convinced that the New Word Fellowship that I discuss in “Worship” can be an important vehicle for generating answers to these questions. Which is why I think it important to create Fellowships. At the beginning of this essay I suggested that the two problems we face today are the short-run problem of massive ill-being and the long-run problem of potential extinction (and not just for *our* species, of course). I’m convinced that Fellowships, in the process of addressing the above three questions, can arrive at answers to those questions which, in their implementation, would simultaneously address the ill-being and extinction problems.

Today's Prophetic Concerns

James B. Gray

During a recent discussion, with some relatives, regarding the sad situation of our society currently, someone made the observation that at least there was more freedom in our society than in, e.g., China. None of us present could disagree with this assertion; but the claim set me off to ask (several hours later) two questions:

- How free *are* we actually? Are we in fact basically free or, rather, do we lack substantial freedom—but *believe* we are free simply because we have been so bombarded with propaganda to that effect over the years that we have come to believe the lie? After all, was it not Adolph Hitler who declared that if you tell a Big Lie often enough, people will come to believe it?
- Is freedom the *real issue* anyway? That is, is the primary characteristic of the *Good Society* that its members have freedom? Is it possible that the elite has misled us on two counts?—that (a) we are less free than we may think we are, and (b) there are goals more important than freedom.

I decided that of the two questions, the second one was the more interesting, and therefore began to give it some thought. The results of that cogitation are briefly presented below.

While in college, years ago, I recall reading a book simply titled *Social Control* (originally published in 1947), by Joseph Roucek. I recall virtually nothing about that book except a vague recollection that Roucek's focus was on social control as a means for maintaining societal order. I don't recall if Roucek argued that social control was exercised by the society's elite; whether Roucek perceived social control as inevitable or as necessary; nor do I recall whether Roucek offered any value judgment on the fact of social control—i.e., whether it was desirable or not, in his view. My recollection of this book the day after the above-mentioned conversation did, however, prompt me to ask myself *why* the elite would engage in social control: would they do it for the purpose of establishing and maintaining order or, rather, to serve some other end?

As I thought about this question, it occurred to me that the elite would want order to prevail in “their” society, but this likely would be a means to an end—the end being “using” the non-elite members of the society (along with members of other societies). And if that end could be achieved without exercising much in the way of social control, there would be no need to engage in explicit social control activities (involving, e.g., a large policing force): after all, such activities require the use of time and resources, and if those activities can be avoided, so much the better.

To “use” others should not, of course, be thought of as an end in itself. *Some* may get pathological pleasure from the “using” of people *per se*. One would assume, however, that the elite's “using” of others is not done for its own sake but, rather, for the sake of that which the elite can extract from the non-elite members of the society. Some members of the elite may “use” others to gain recognition/admiration in the eyes of non-elite people. I suspect, however,

that the most common motive for “using” others is to gain wealth—enabling members of the elite to acquire whatever they want.

The matter of what they might want does not concern me here (as a modern who identifies with the Prophetic Tradition). Rather, my interest in the sorts of activities members of the elite might engage in that constitute “using” other people. And my initial assumption here is that the elite has done little shape the course of societal development but, rather, has simply watched societal development occur and then—perhaps with the aid of lackeys in its employ—determined how best to take advantage of societal developments for its own (basically) financial advantage. Despite the fact that the elite has done little to shape the society’s development, I assume that it has taken heed (again, through the eyes of the prostitutes in its employ) of untoward developments (whether in the form of social movements, technological innovations, etc.) that may have gotten underway, and squelched them.

If, then, we assume that the elite takes the Existing Order as a “given,” and asks how best to take advantage of the “lowers” who are a part of that Order, we can further assume that the elite is faced with four questions:

- What specifically can it do to “use” non-elite members of the society?
- How can it divert the attention of non-members so that their minds will be occupied on matters other than their being “used”—so they won’t notice the fact that they’re being “used”?
- How can it prevent non-members from learning about how the society “works”?—i.e., the fact that it “works” in such a way as to ensure that non-elite members of the society get “screwed.”
- What does it need to do to convince non-elite members of the society that *how* the Existing Order is, is as it *must* be?—that this is the “best possible of all worlds” (as Voltaire’s Dr. Pangloss put it).

Let me make just a few brief comments relative to each of these points.

It can “use” non-members of the elite by keeping the unemployment rate high (thereby depressing wages and salaries)—doing this in part by “outsourcing” work to other parts of the world; by encouraging—via advertising—them to spend, spend, spend (including with the use of credit cards)—to keep them effectually poor; by continually raising prices, e.g., gasoline and other necessities; by shifting the tax burden from themselves to members of the non-elite; etc.

It can divert the attention of non-elite members away from the workings of the economy—the society in general—by promoting TV watching, interest in sporting events, shopping, etc. And, of course, there is our current war effort to bring democracy to those backward people in Iraq? (As if Washington, DC, is populated by a different sort of being!)

It can prevent non-elite members from gaining an understanding of their society by influencing education institutions (e.g., by providing them with free “educational” materials); by gaining

ownership of the press (and thereby withholding information from the public, and providing it with “slanted” stories—and outright lies); by sponsoring radio commentators who speak “authoritatively” on issues of the day; etc.

It can convince members of the non-elite that the Existing Order is good—or, at least, is as it must be—by promoting the development and promulgation of theories that provide “definitive proof” that this is so. Given that the academic discipline of Economics (and, to a lesser degree, Sociology) has theories that are useful for this purpose, the elite especially looks to that “science” for justifying theories. The fact that that theory has its roots in an outdated *physical* theory—i.e., Newtonian physics (associated with Isaac Newton, 1643 – 1727)—does not prevent this body of theory from being useful to the elite.

To return to my initial discussion: Although I have made no attempt to prove here that we lack in freedom, it should be clear to most readers that our freedoms *are* being eroded—which is not to say, of course, that our situation is comparable to that of the Chinese. But the question that I find more relevant than the matter of freedom is: Are we being used? And if so, how?

It seems to me that insofar as “our” elite *controls* the society, this is done in the process of “using” our society’s non-elite members in a broad sense—directly and, e.g., by doing what it can to keep people “in the dark” regarding the workings of the society. If this statement is true, the implication is that the “liberal” approach to addressing the problem—that of educating people—is a foolish one; for that approach evinces a lack of insight into the nature of the problem.

What seems clear, rather, regarding how to “fix” this problem of the elite “using” people is that a small vanguard consisting of people who recognize the nature of the problem begin acting in a fashion that undermines the *support base* of the elite. What should this vanguard do—beyond acting in a non-violent manner? I have no specific recommendations to offer here except that they initiate New Word Fellowships (see my [Worship](#)), and see if Fellowship sessions result in implementable ideas. *I’m* convinced that they will.

Our Common Handicap

James B. Gray

I assume that my elementary school experience was not unique, in that the picture of our society that I encountered—in textbooks especially—was one in which people worked at a variety of jobs, the “division of labor” being such that all the work *needing* to be done *was* done. That is, society, I learned, is a sort of machine consisting of a series of parts (i.e., jobs), and these parts mesh together perfectly. Alternately, human society is a sort of ecological system characterized by balance and harmony. The learning that was involved here was, I should add, not so much the result of conscious teaching as it was the result of the unconscious use of inferential reasoning on my part.

Although I did not recognize such at the time, I realize now that the jobs in the world that I was learning about were all occupied by males—the role of females being that of housewife: a variety of roles were available to males, but just one to females. Thus, while the adult males of the society were away at work, their wives were at home taking care of the children, preparing meals (and washing the dishes afterward), doing the laundry, and keeping the interior of the house neat and clean. In this world all adults were married, of course, all were heterosexual, and all lived in houses: no one lived in apartments—and, of course, no one lived on the streets.

In this (“utopian”) society everyone had a place (there was no unemployment, of course), and everyone *knew* his/her place. The society was, it seemed, a *static* one also, so that one week was like the previous one, one month like the previous one, one year like the previous one—and, presumably, one decade was like the previous one. Presumably the year had seasons, but the work of the society seemingly was not affected by seasonal variations in temperature/precipitation conditions—although this was not necessarily true for the activities of children (who would, e.g., swim during the summer and sled/skate during the winter).

Needless to say, the picture of society that I (along with many others, I assume) was presented in elementary school bore little resemblance to reality. And as I think about this experience 60 years later, the questions that occur to me are:

- Did this picture reflect someone’s (or some group’s) concept of the Good Society? Or, rather
- Was it a picture concocted by lackeys in the employ of the elite in an effort to manipulate our minds—in such a way as to tend to make us accepting of the society that we would be entering in a few years? So that in accepting that society, we would tend not to criticize it—not so much we *lacked* criticisms but, rather, because we would tend to feel *guilty* if we voiced our criticisms, and even admitted them to ourselves. So that, further, in not articulating criticisms—or even admitting them to ourselves—we would “naturally” refrain from engaging in any efforts to “reform” the society: because, after all, this was a perfect society that was just fine the way it was, and therefore in no need of reform.

The second explanation is, for me, the more plausible one. And insofar as that explanation is the correct one, the implication is that many—perhaps most—of us grew up with a serious handicap:

we were in effect “brainwashed” by our public (and even private?) elementary schools regarding the nature of our society—and surreptitiously fed a diet of values that has corrupted our value system ever since.

I am not the first to note that much of life consists of unlearning what one had learned in elementary and secondary school (even in college/university, for that matter!), but let me list here some of the problems with our early “education” (i.e., indoctrination):

- Some of the ideals that we were taught (if but implicitly) should be rejected—e.g., that “women’s place is in the home,” homosexuality is contrary to nature—and a sin besides.
- Some of the “facts” that we learned (again, if but implicitly) simply aren’t true—e.g., that unemployment doesn’t exist, that society is static, that our society is a meritocratic one.
- It’s good that our society is a meritocratic one: the hallmark of the Good Society is that it is meritocratic in that everyone is rewarded on the basis of desert, and only that.
- The “societal theory” that we absorbed during the “educational” process—we live in a society of opportunity; all achieve in accordance with their abilities, and are rewarded in proportion to their contribution; all normal people accept these “facts;” and therefore harmony prevails in the society—is open to question in that it inhibits one from not only understanding how the society “works,” but feeling comfortable in developing and voicing criticisms of the society—and then acting on those criticisms. So that, as an adult, one may, e.g., have difficulty accepting labor unions as having legitimacy—therefore be reluctant to join a union, and especially feel it as virtually traitorous to work for the establishment of a labor union at one’s place of work. (After all, a “free enterprise” economy by definition cannot contain labor unions—and a “free enterprise” economy is clearly superior to any other sort of economic system.)

What’s tragic about this “messaging up” of our minds that the schools accomplish is not only that it inhibits us from addressing the problems of our society (and even recognizing their existence!), but that it affects our everyday lives. Our thinking processes become muddled—so that we find it difficult to differentiate between facts and values, develop a clear and consistent value system, and be able to differentiate fact from propaganda—and it may take us a lifetime to correct this problem. Many, of course, never do free themselves from this intellectual prison.

Is there an answer to this problem? The only answer I see is to emulate the Amish in our midst—not in all respects, of course, but in the sense that they have developed a subsociety within the Larger Society (but, unfortunately, have increasingly become dependent on the Larger Society). By creating an alternate society within the Larger one, and working for the expansion of that society, there exists the possibility that future children can be raised without the handicaps that now afflict most of us. And the New Word Fellowship (see my [Worship](#)) can be a vehicle for generating ideas on how to go about doing this.

The current case of the polygamous ranch in Texas reminds us of the fact that many of those who have become involved in creating alternate societies within the Larger Society have been guided by ideas rightly regarded as questionable. And because such distorted efforts seemingly are the

norm, any effort to create an alternate society on a less questionable basis is likely to come under suspicion. To, even, be slandered—given a “bad press.”

Whether the latter would occur because certain people see such efforts as a threat, and want to “nip them in the bud” or, rather, because certain people simply react in a “knee jerk” fashion to that which is out of the ordinary, the point is that those who resolve to create an alternate society within the Larger Society are strongly advised to be aware that their efforts likely will be scrutinized by outsiders—may even be criticized unfairly by outsiders. *Proceed with caution*, then, is the rule that should be followed; or, as the Bible puts it, be as wise as serpents, while being as harmless as doves.

Critiquing Economic Development Theory

James B. Gray

Economic *development* theory is a branch of economic theory; therefore, the starting point here must be an identification of the salient features of that more general body of theory. And given that *that* theory is based on certain assumptions—stated and unstated—those assumptions must first be identified. These assumptions are of two types—those that pertain to individuals/households, and those that pertain to the area occupied by the individuals. I begin with those assumptions that pertain to individuals/households:

- Individuals occur in households, but the only household member of interest is the “breadwinner,” assumed to be the husband.
- All individuals are *consumers*, but only the husband is a *producer*. The “work” of the wife consists of “housework”: caring for children, preparing meals, doing dishes, cleaning, etc.
- All households consist of a husband, a wife, and an unspecified number of children.
- All individuals exist in households; no “isolates” exist (implying, e.g., that no gays exist).
- All individuals engage in various activities, but only those of the husband are of interest.
- His activities are all of an economic nature (i.e., ones involving, or associated with, “production”).
- Husbands vary in their abilities, there being two “facts” of importance regarding that variation:
 - Abilities vary from husband to husband from an *industrial* standpoint—i.e., the types of products to make. This variation, however, has its basis in *learning*, not genetics—i.e., it is an *acquired* characteristic.
 - Abilities vary from an *occupational* standpoint—i.e., some husbands (a) have an ability to initiate and manage firms, some (b) to perform production work, and some (c) to supervise those engaged in production work. This variation has its basis in *genetics*.

Those in the (a) category are *owners*; those in the (b) and (c) categories are *employees*. In any given industry, then, there are both owners and employees.
- Although husbands vary in their abilities, the fact that all wives are engaged only in domestic duties implies that wives do not vary in their abilities—with the further implication that wives are of a “lower order” (regarding abilities) than husbands.

- Households do not interact one with another—except that husbands interact with other husbands at places of employment.²⁵¹
- The individuals in any given household have need of certain things for their survival—especially food, water, clothing, shelter, furnishings for their shelters, equipment for heating their shelters, etc. These items must all be purchased.
- Besides having needs, individuals have wants. Wants are also satisfied by, and only by, purchasing things; wants are unlimited.
- As happiness is obtained from, and only from, the consumption of things—to satisfy needs first, and then wants—the more one acquires and then consumes, the happier one becomes.
- Given this “fact” regarding happiness, individuals can be labeled as *selfish*—as, indeed, selfish by nature.²⁵² A value judgment should not be applied to this “fact” because, after all, that’s just how people are, and they can’t help it.²⁵³
- Given that only matter is real, individuals are to be thought of as aggregates of matter, the brain existing as a survival instrument. Thus, the individual is basically a machine in the sense of acting in a rather mechanical way—differing from a machine mainly in having different sorts of needs (e.g., having a need for food and water, unlike machines; *not* having a need for lubrication, unlike machines).

As to assumptions pertaining to the area occupied by households:

- It should *not* be thought of as an “environment,” for that term implies that the thing being given that name somehow affects that which is in it. Here, the area occupied by the households is thought of simply as *containing* them: it’s simply where the households *are*.
- All parts of the area are under ownership—under, indeed, *private* ownership.
- Households vary in how much property—real and otherwise—they own, with owner/managers tending to own most, supervisors next most, and production workers least. (Therefore, owners are happiest, and production workers least happy.)

251 One is not to ask the embarrassing question of how, then, young people get together for the purpose of marriage. Perhaps we must assume that all marriages are arranged by parents!

252 One is expected to overlook the (also embarrassing) fact that human babies require care for their very survival!

253 John B. Cobb, Jr., in his 2002 “Buddhist-Christian [Critique](#) of Neo-Liberal Economics” made the astute comment that: “People are not by nature primarily *Homo economicus*. The social and economic system *turns them into* [my italics] this kind of [despicable] creature.”

- The land of the given area is used for, and only for, dwelling units and facilities for economic activities. None of the land is used for, e.g., government buildings, social clubs, or churches—because the area has no government, nor do the people residing in the area socialize one with another or have any sort of religion. (After all, machines do not engage in worship activities—regardless of how one defines “[Worship](#)”!)
- A force²⁵⁴ is continuously at work within the area that has the following two effects (among others to be identified shortly):
 - It determines prices paid for goods and labor. (Note that in this area the “worth” of something is only expressed in monetary²⁵⁵ terms.)
 - It determines how many people are employed in a given industry. (Within a given firm—regardless of industry—the ratio of production workers to supervisors, and ratio of supervisors to managers is a constant.²⁵⁶)
- This force also acts to make individuals strive to be as *productive* as possible. To, that is, produce as much as possible during a given time period—given the tools (defined broadly) at their disposal.
- In addition, the force acts to make a firm’s owner/manager strive to make his firm as *efficient* as possible. That is, he will strive to choose that combination of inputs whose total cost for a certain level of production will, when subtracted from the total revenue anticipated for that level of production yield the highest profit.
- Finally, this force acts to increase the likelihood of innovations that enable ever increasing efficiency. The innovations might relate to how the production process is organized, what tools (broadly defined) are used in the production process, etc. Insofar as these innovations allow increasing “economies of scale,” some firms in a given industry may begin to grow in size—in the process forcing smaller firms in that industry out of business. This may result in some unemployment; but if the owner/managers of such firms anticipate being driven out of business, and then invent a new product to produce, the amount of unemployment that occurs may be minimal.

254 This gives us a clue to the fact that the founder of modern economic theory (Adam Smith) was strongly influenced—whether or not he was aware of this—by the physical theory of Isaac Newton. Which is why some refer to Smith’s theory as (merely) applied Newtonianism.

255 Note that I assume that a monetary system exists in the area, which fact raises questions such as: Who creates the money? How does money enter the economy?—so that it can be used in economic transactions.

256 Note here that although I assume that an owner is also a manager, I do not assume that all managers are owners. The owner of a firm may, however, tend to choose as fellow managers others who are relatives, *ceteris paribus*. That is, of two individuals equally qualified for a managerial position, if one is a relative, he would likely be the one chosen for the position.

Innovations are likely to occur, and as they occur, they will likely (a) spur additional innovation (i.e., the invention of new products) and (b) result in some unemployment. As innovation is likely to occur on a continual basis, the phenomenon of unemployment is likely to be continuous, but varying in magnitude. It's not clear here how the unemployed manage given that no government exists to help them—and private charity would be assumed to not occur, because giving to others would reduce one's happiness.

Given this perspective on economic theory *per se*, we can next specify the nature of a part of economic theory that has become important in recent decades, economic *development* theory. In referring to this body of theory we can think in terms of a *regional* variation (with "regions" usually being thought of as areas within a given nation) or *national* variation (so that the countries of the world—or groups of them in some cases—are thought of as the units being compared). Let us assume that our scale is the *global* scale, so that the units involved are either entire countries or groups of contiguous countries.

Economic development theory, then, is based on the assumption that different areas (countries or country groupings, in our case here) are at different levels of development. That is, countries vary not so much in *qualitative* terms developmentally, but in *quantitative* terms. In other words, it's not that countries vary in the *kinds* of development they exhibit but in *level* (or *degree*) of development—from, e.g., "under developed" to "developed." Closely related with this concept of degrees of development is that of the concept of *modernization*—so that a "developed" country is said to have a "modern" economy, an "underdeveloped" country a "backward" one.

Given the basic assumptions in economic theory that individuals are "driven" to be happy, and that happiness comes from, and only from, the consumption of goods, it is not surprising that those assumptions are carried over into economic *development* theory. And although a basic assumption of economic theory is that people are naturally selfish (for being unselfish detracts from one's happiness), economists themselves—in addressing the matter of economic development—typically not only are interested in the "fact" that some countries have a low level of development but assert that this is not a *good* situation. That is, given that the average person in a country with a low level of economic development is unhappy, and unhappiness is not good, it follows that that country should be helped to increase its level of development. (Actually, the value judgment involved here may be one made by leaders of a country with a "high" level of economic development, who have decided to help another country increase its level of economic development, and therefore enlisted the assistance of economic development specialists for ideas regarding what specifically to do.²⁵⁷)

²⁵⁷ Evidently *individuals* are expected to behave in a "rational" manner, and this involves trying to maximize income—so that they can maximize purchases, and thereby maximize consumption on their part (with family members being included in the "their" here). However, *countries* need not, for some unknown reason, engage in rational behavior in this sense, and can "legitimately" render assistance to other countries. If leaders of a developed country decide to help another country "develop" its economy, and enlist the help of economists (for ideas as to what specifically to do), economists will regard it as rational behavior on *their* part to accept employment with that end—and will, then, develop ideas for raising the level of economic development of the country in question. Ideas that, in being implemented, will of course work—because they are rooted in a theory that *predicts* they will. (Ya, sure!)

If, then, an economist who has specialized in measuring levels of economic development (using the country as his unit of analysis), and has then gone on to develop an explanation for inter-country variations in level of economic development is asked—as an “expert”—to step outside his role as a scientist²⁵⁸ and develop *recommendations*, the question arises: What can we predict as to the nature of those recommendations? That is, what do we know about the nature of economic thinking—economic theory in particular—that might help us make a reasonable prediction as to the suggestions that an economic development specialist would likely make? What sort of plan is he likely to develop for the country in question?

Let us assume that the economist is one who was born, raised, and educated in the United States. Given this assumption, I would predict that he would start with the (tacit) assumption that the United States represents the apex of development, so that the questions before him²⁵⁹ would be:

- What resources—natural, man-made, and human—does the given country have?
- Given those resources, what changes can be made in the country’s economy to make it more like the United States?

If the economist were from Germany or France, etc., he might ask the same questions, but tacitly—even explicitly—regard *his own* country as the standard to use, of course.

Our hypothetical economist, in developing his plan, likely would enunciate as his first principle that the country in question should begin producing for the “world market,” and focus on producing that for which it has a competitive advantage in that market. Does, e.g., the country have deposits of certain rare minerals. Does it have soil and climatic conditions that would enable it to produce certain agricultural produces that cannot be produced most other places? Does it have a labor supply that can be trained, yet will work at a low wage? By addressing questions of this sort, our economist can arrive at conclusions as to *what* product(s) the country should develop a capability of producing.

As to the matter of *how* firms in that country should be producing, the answer is simple: use the most up-to-date technology, get on the path to modernization.

Finally, concerning production, there are decisions to be made as to *where*, in the country, to introduce this new production; and in answering this question our economist would consider where resources exist in the country, how the population is distributed, the nature of the country’s topography, where the country’s chief ports (if any) are, etc.

In addition, there would be recommendations to be made regarding *who* should implement the plan. Our economist, being an enthusiastic advocate of “free markets,” likely would recommend that government keep its hands off the development process—because, after all, govern can only “interfere,” “mess things up.” This leave private firms to do the development work—and the

²⁵⁸ The roles of a “scientist” are here thought of as measurement, description, and explanation (i.e., providing answers to the question of why things are as they are).

²⁵⁹ I don’t want to insult womankind by suggesting that our hypothetical economist might be a woman!

economist might recommend (if from the U. S.) that U.S. firms be encouraged to provide the leadership. After all, they are modern in their technology and thinking, and have abundant experience besides.

As to how developmental plans should be funded, there are various possibilities, such as using the World Bank.

Can this plan, when implemented, be expected to result in the country's development? Probably. But that's not the relevant question, I would suggest. The relevant question, from my perspective as one strongly influenced by the Bible: Will the lot of the people be improved—and in *all* respects, not just in material “standard of living”? Likely not. What's likely, rather, is that the disparities that had existed in the country before the development—the “modernization”—would become even more extreme with the development; so that the lot of “the many” would decline rather than rise.²⁶⁰ And why? Because the theory upon which the plan was based consisted of assumptions that are wildly at variance with reality, and value assumptions that make a mockery of, e.g., the famous “plan of salvation” passage in Matthew 25.

There is no need to comment here on the assumptions that I see as constituting economic theory—for they “convict” themselves. Yet people who accept these ideas play a highly significant role not only in our society, but in the world—and even win Nobel prizes. How do you figure?!!

²⁶⁰ See, e.g., Jeff Faux's *The Global Class War*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006.

Whither are we Tending?

James B. Gray

The election hoopla that USans have been inundated with over the past several months is best viewed as calculated to convince the average person that s/he plays an important role in our governance. That is, we are living in a carnival, and magicians have been using their skill at misdirection to divert our minds from what's going on in the world that's *really* important. What's *that*? The rise, over the past few decades, of what David Rothkopf has termed a global *Superclass* (2008). (Rothkopf evinces too much approval of this class for my tastes; therefore, my reference to the book here should not be interpreted as meaning that I am recommending the book—for I am most certainly not.)

This “class” is not merely a global group in the sense of being a *statistical* artifact. Increasingly it has become a *sociological* group—i.e., a group, many of whose members associate one with another on a regular basis (e.g., in Davos, Switzerland, and over the telephone); a group, indeed, that prefers to associate primarily with others in the class—regardless of nationality, race, etc.—rather than with fellow countrymen (or -women—for some females are in the group, if only via marriage). Rothkopf sets the number of people in the class as around 6,000—which seems like a large number, except when one compares that number to the globe's *total* population.

Members of this class have in common that all are fabulously wealthy. The disturbing feature of the group, however, is that many of its members occupy positions that enable them, through their decisions, to affect the lives of literally millions of other people. That is, a tremendous amount of *power* is concentrated in the hands of the people constituting the membership of this group. And—unsurprisingly—it appears that virtually no one in the group takes any heed of Jesus's injunctions (as recorded in Matthew 25) to give food to the hungry, etc. True, people in this class may be supportive of various “development” efforts ostensibly *intended* to help the unfortunate; but those efforts too often fail (utterly in many cases) in accomplishing their supposed ends, and instead simply further enrich members of this “superclass.”

Although every member of this class was born and raised in some country, members of this class have largely lost their national identities: they think of themselves as *world* citizens rather than citizens of their countries of birth. And *that* fact has the important implication that the decisions of members of this class are increasingly such as to render the *nation state* more and more irrelevant as a unit. Corporations have, of course, for decades now been growing in significance relative to the nation state. But increasingly, the significant units in the world are *private* mega-organizations rather than nation states—including the United States, or even the European Union.

At least two questions are suggested by this development:

- What explanation can be offered for the rise of this superclass?
- Can we ordinary people gain any degree of control over this group?

(Note that I have not listed the question—Is it a good thing that we now have a superclass?—because I regard such a question as a mere rhetorical one.) Below I choose to address only the first question—although the answer I provide to that question has clear implications for the second one.

One explanation that can be offered is that institutional and technological developments (particularly in the communication and computational realms) have been such as to *enable* the development of a superclass. And that this development has been occurring while the selfish behavior that has been with us for centuries has continued to be a feature of human behavior—especially on the part of the rich.

Some would argue regarding selfishness, of course, that it is a feature of “human nature,” but there are good reasons for rejecting that argument—not identified here. Suffice it to say that modern selfish behavior may have its roots, in part, in the Protestant Reformation of several centuries ago: it may have been promoted (inadvertently) by the likes of John Calvin. However, regardless of how selfishness, in its modern form, came into existence, it should be kept in mind that the societal systems that have been developing in the West (and especially in the United States) are such as to *reward* selfish behavior—thereby virtually *requiring* one to be greedy and selfish to survive. As Thorstein Veblen, in his brilliant *The Theory of the [Leisure Class](#)* (1899, Chapter Nine, “The Conservation of Archaic Traits”), put it: “All classes are in a measure engaged in the pecuniary struggle, and in all classes the possession of the pecuniary traits counts towards the success and survival of the individual.”

This explanation of the rise of the superclass is certainly a plausible one. There is, however, another explanation that I find more convincing. It is, I will admit, an “off the wall” explanation—but one that is no more “off the wall” than economic theories that enable one to be awarded a Nobel prize! (Or win prizes in journalism. I’m alluded here, of course, to Milton and Thomas—but I will not be so rude as to mention any last names!)

This second theory has no name of which I am aware, so I will call it the “Gaia theory.” It assumes that Earth is a system that behaves as if it had a mind of its own—so that there is justification in personifying it, and giving it the name “Gaia.” The theory next states that with the Agricultural Revolution it gradually “dawned” on Gaia that it had made a mistake in allowing humans to evolve—for their “eating of the tree of knowledge” was leading them to remove themselves—intellectually *and* physically—from their Surround, and thereby become a menace to Gaia.

Gaia, in foreseeing the consequences of the human presence on Earth, concluded that humankind was a variety of cancer, and therefore should be excised before it killed its host. It therefore developed a plan to rid itself of humankind: it caused humans to engage in developments (intellectual, institutional, technological) that would eventuate in their extinction. Unfortunately, this would inevitably involve the concomitant destruction of many other species—but would be worth the price. For, after all, these other species could be allowed to evolve anew.

Given that it’s likely (as some scientists state) that 60% of all species now existing will be extinct before the end of this century—and the percent may be even higher, given that climatologists keep finding that their projections are *understated*—there is good reason to believe

that *our* species will be among those that become extinct within a matter of decades. Therefore, there would appear to be a good reason for accepting this Gaia theory. It is not a comforting theory, by any means! By why does a theory need to be comforting to be accepted?

In fact, perhaps the criterion that we should use in deciding whether or not to accept the Gaia theory is that of *usefulness*—and here I would argue that despite the fact that the Gaia theory *appears* to be a depressing one, it can also be viewed as a *motivating* one. That is, if one comes to believe that our life as a species is near its end, perhaps within a matter of decades, the “message” that should come through to us is: It’s high time to get started—beginning yesterday!—in developing a “plan of salvation.” I will not offer such a plan here except to recommend that people begin to create New Word Fellowships (see my [Worship](#)) and use this institution as a vehicle for bringing about societal system change. Change that, on the one hand, would result in a sustainable way of life for all; change that, on the other hand, would rid the world of the radical disparities that currently exist.

Some are likely to respond that *God* will save us, so that we need not worry overly much about the future; we should not attempt to save ourselves but, rather, “leave it all in God’s hands.” Although I reject this point of view, my own—as presented in, e.g., “Worship,” *does* overlap with it. For the New Word Fellowship assumes that *we* must save ourselves, but would be wise to look to God for guidance—in terms of *current* revelation, though, rather than *Biblical* revelation. If, then, you have the energy, ability, and inclination to initiate a Fellowship, why not do so?!

Is “Voluntary Simplicity” the Answer?

James B. Gray

“Voluntary simplicity” (or “simple living,” or “sustainable living,” etc.) has been touted as the answer to our environmental problems—i.e., the facts that we are running out of natural resources and polluting the atmosphere, rivers, lakes, groundwater, etc. (thereby creating health problems, and even threatening the continued existence of species—including our own). And in the process the impression has been given that there are two ways of living: conventional living on the one hand, and “voluntary simplicity” on the other. But *are* these the only two possibilities? Indeed, does not this classification reflect the individualistic bias that permeates our thought processes in this society?

In addressing these questions, it will be useful to focus on pollution (rather than also resource depletion), and to begin by asking: What are the sources of pollution? And a useful way of answering that question is to identify the following three sources (taking here the perspective of the individual citizen):

- The heating and cooling of homes.
- Transportation:
 - Personal trips (work, shopping, pleasure, etc.).
 - Goods/services purchased.
- Consumption.

The *heating/cooling of homes* typically involves the use of natural gas, fuel oil, or coal—all of which are inherently polluting, in that they involve removal of carbon buried safely under the earth’s surface and its (re-) introduction (as a “greenhouse gas” into the atmosphere. Some depend on electric heating (often involving coal-burning). A few in our society use wood, corn cobs or other plant-based materials; given that the plants involved extracted carbon from the atmosphere during their growth, their use as a fuel merely transfers most of that carbon back into the atmosphere (although their “harvesting” may have negated this).

Transportation of people/goods typically involves the use of petroleum products, and thereby pollution. If individuals use automobiles for their transportation (to work, to retail stores, to physicians, for pleasure, etc.), their “pollution responsibility” will depend on the amount of driving they do and the size of their vehicle. If they are able to rely on mass transit, their pollution responsibility is, of course, less. Besides *direct* pollution responsibility, however, there is *indirect* responsibility: every time one makes a purchase (even of services), the purchase is of things that were transported—so that one becomes partially (if indirectly) responsible for the pollution associated with that transportation.

Consumption involves pollution, first, in that the energy usage associated with food preparation, dish washing, vacuuming, etc. typically involves pollution. But beyond the *direct* pollution

responsibility associated with consumption, there is indirect responsibility in the sense that whatever one purchases for consumption likely involved pollution in its production. Thus, all purchasers of any given product (and even services—given that products are associated with those services) share in responsibility for the pollution (direct *and* indirect) associated with that production.

Knowing the sources of pollution (from the standpoint of the individual), the next step is to develop a classification of “living arrangements.” I offer the following classification as a useful one, given the goal here of assessing “voluntary simplicity.” The classification is based on the assumption that two basic modes of living have relevance here, (a) living as a member of what I will call the “Larger Society” and living in an “intentional community.”

I. Living as a member of the Larger Society.

A. Living *and* working in Larger Society.

1. Living conventionally (i.e., as if one had “affluenza”!).
2. Living in a “voluntary simplicity” manner.

B. Living as a member of the Larger Society, but working in an intentional community.

1. The intentional community offers an ecologically-oriented lifestyle.
2. It doesn’t.

II. Living in an intentional community.

A. Living *and* working in an intentional community.

1. The intentional community offers an ecologically-oriented lifestyle.
2. It doesn’t.

B. Living in an intentional community, but working in the Larger Society

1. The intentional community offers an ecologically-oriented lifestyle.
2. It doesn’t

We have, then, in this classification modes of life representing varying degrees of involvement with the Larger Society. Let us next, then, comment briefly on each category from the standpoint of the amount of pollution expected to be associated with each mode. I will not attempt to suggest any quantitative values associated with the various modes, but will only suggest a rank ordering—and will discuss the eight (8) categories in order of the rank ordering that I would assign to them—from most polluting to least.

I.A.1. **Living (conventionally) and Working in the Larger Society**

The typical lifestyle of the USan is too familiar to require comment. The only point that I will therefore make is that one can argue that as household income increases, so does pollution responsibility tend to increase. Yielding the ironic fact that although status and admiration tend to increase with increasing income, so does evil: we most admire those who are responsible for the most damage! Unfortunately, our legal system makes no recognition of this fact either.

I.B.2. **Living in the Larger Society, Working in an Intentional Community that Doesn't Offer an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle**

The lifestyle involved here is an extremely rare one, virtually non-existent; therefore, it is worth recognizing only as a “theoretical,” rather than empirical, category. It's not even clear that it would be a less-polluting lifestyle than I.A.1.—and might even be more polluting, if the distance traveled to work is long. (The fact that this traveling could not be via mass transit must be emphasized.) The only factor that might make this a less polluting lifestyle than I.A.1. is the possibility that the community in question might raise some of the food consumed by community members, and make this available to “outsiders”—including ones who were employed in the community.

II.B.2. **Living in an Intentional Community that Doesn't Offer an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle, Working in the Larger Society**

The lifestyle associated with this mode of living is also not necessarily less polluting than either I.A.1. or I.B.2. The community might produce some of the food consumed by community members, but the pollution advantage offered by that fact might be offset by the pollution associated with driving to work (the use of mass transit not being possible here). Thus, to place this lifestyle third on the list is an arbitrary matter on my part.

II.A.2. **Living and Working in an Intentional Community that Doesn't Offer an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle**

Even though the intentional community may not have been deliberately designed to provide an ecologically-oriented lifestyle, it might to a degree: some of the food consumed by community members might be locally produced, housing units might have been built small enough to not require much (polluting) energy, transportation by automobile might be minimal, etc.

I.A.2. **Living (in a “voluntary simplicity” manner) and Working in the Larger Society**

This mode of living might be termed one that involves *in situ* adjustment. That is, one chooses (resigns oneself to?) to remain at one's current residential location, and continue working at one's place of employment, but resolves minimize one's “pollution contribution” under those circumstances. One may be restricted in how much food one can produce for oneself (and family), but can attempt to “buy locally” so far as possible (e.g., by patronizing farmers' markets), buy used clothing and furniture, keep the thermostat as low as possible, eschew luxury items and spectator sports, engage in forms of exercise that involve little monetary investment

(e.g., walking, biking), use public transportation exclusively (if possible), junk the TV set and spend more time conversing and playing games, use candles for lighting, etc.

I.B.1. Living in the Larger Society, Working in an Intentional Community that Offers an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle

We have here a situation that offers some of the advantages of II.A.1., but also some of the disadvantages of I.A.2. It is rather similar to the I.B.2. situation, except that the intentional community in this case is one designed for ecologically-oriented living. If, in living in the Larger Society, one strives to practice “voluntary simplicity,” one can reduce one’s pollution contribution; and one’s contact with the intentional community can enable one to acquire items that have been produced locally. On the other hand, working in an intentional community would require one to use an automobile to transport oneself to the community, and this would be a pollution-contributing factor. Again, however, the number of people having this lifestyle is miniscule, so that the category has “theoretical” significance, but not empirical.

II.B.1. Living in an Intentional Community that Offers an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle, but Working in the Larger Society

What is said below under II.A.1 would also apply here, except that if some members of the community work in the Larger Society, the transportation thereby involved likely would involve pollution—at least in the sense that the manufacture of the vehicle(s) used, and its transportation, would have involved pollution. On the positive side, the income used by those working in the Larger Society could enable community members to purchase certain items (e.g., windmills) that would contribute to an ecologically-responsible way of life, but were beyond their capability to produce locally. In addition, some of this income could be used to help needy neighbors (e.g., by hiring them—so that they are able to retain their self-respect).

II.A.1. Living and Working in an Intentional Community that Offers an Ecologically-Oriented Lifestyle

Those who created the community would have ensured that buildings had been constructed using local materials so far as possible, and built to minimize the need for auxiliary sources of heating (i.e., well-insulated, passive solar heating, perhaps earth sheltering) —and no need for cooling. The community would have enough land to enable production of much of the food needs of community members—with perhaps even an excess of food being produced for the purpose of sale and giving to needy neighbors. Food would be produced in an ecologically-sound manner (using, e.g., “permacultural” procedures). Furniture would either be purchased from second-hand stores or constructed by community members. No part of the property would be recognized as “lawn”—obviating the necessity of “mowing the lawn.” Clothing would be obtained from second-hand stores, with some even being made by community members. An effort would be made to produce the community’s energy needs locally (e.g., via windmills, raising of algae for biodiesel). If it were felt necessary to have an automobile, one (or a few) would be purchased as community property, and made available to community members as needed. The general principle followed here would be that of striving for the highest degree of “community sufficiency” possible. This would involve striving to minimize the use of energy—that coming from petroleum products in particular. By minimizing the direct and indirect use of (polluting)

energy sources—and otherwise utilizing ecological principles in their living—the members of the intentional community would minimize the size of their “footprint.”

What conclusions can we draw here?

- It is overly simplistic to think in terms of just two categories, (a) conventional living and (b) voluntary simplicity living.
- The fifth category in the above discussion—wherein “voluntary simplicity” is first mentioned—is how “voluntary simplicity” seemingly is usually conceived.
- Although that category is in the bottom half of the eight (8) categories—and that’s good—I have placed it at the top of that bottom half—which isn’t so good.
- It would appear clear that pollution can be minimized only if our society consisted basically of small intentional communities.

This latter conclusion is an important one for those of us whose thinking is dominated by the “discrepancy” concept—i.e., the thesis that prior to the Agricultural Revolution humans became “designed” for a certain way of life (in terms of stimuli, items to be ingested, and behaviors); after that Revolution ways of life began to change while human biology remained relatively unchanged; a growing “discrepancy” therefore developed between the way of life for which we had been designed and that which we have been forced to live; and this “discrepancy” is the ultimate cause of virtually all of humankind’s problems. For given that the solution to this “discrepancy” problem might very well coincide with the solution to the pollution problem (i.e., societal system change in the direction of a society of cooperative eco-communities), the basis for accepting this solution becomes even stronger.

Needless to say, policy makers in this society and media people will not identify this solution as even a *conceivable* one; and if it is one that they recognize as at least conceivable, they will dismiss it as “utopian”—meaning impossible to achieve. Given this, the implication is that if these people are allowed to have their way, it’s highly likely that the human species (along with many other species, of course) will be “history” before the century is out. Meaning, further, that if “salvation” is to come to humankind, it will need to be via a small vanguard who know where we must go, and have the interest and means to help steer us in that direction.

Given such a vanguard, how should they proceed? On the one hand there is plenty of excellent literature “out there” that should prove useful, but in adding my “two cents worth” of advice I would add: create New Word Fellowships (see my [Worship](#)), and use the discussion process involved with them as a means of generating ideas.

There is, however, no guarantee that humankind *can* be saved from extinction, of course. But that possibility must not give us an excuse for not at least *trying* to save our species.

An Alternate Trinity

James B. Gray

The trinity of Christianity consists of three *Beings*: God the Father, Jesus the Son (of God), and the Holy Spirit (or Ghost). And their significance, for the Christian, is that they are Beings whose existence one is expected to “believe in”—as a unitary Being at that! They are not, however, Beings that one is expected to *know*. That is, one, as a Christian, is expected to know something *about* these three beings, of course. But knowing *about* is by no means the same thing as *knowing*.

If one is asked what one knows *about* some other person, one will proceed to list information about the person—how the person looks, where the person lives, what s/he does for a living, etc. But if one truly *knows* the person in question, one will recognize that one’s knowledge regarding that person is something cannot be fully captured in words. Likewise, if one truly knows *God*, one will not be able to express that knowledge in words—except to be in a position to express two criticisms of the conventional Trinitarian concept:

- It falsely separates God from the Holy Spirit—for one who knows God *thereby* knows the Holy Spirit (given that it is simply another name for God).
- It falsely includes Jesus in the group—for Jesus, although an example of one who clearly *knew* God, was a human being like you and I (which might be regarded as the major message of the Gospel of Thomas).

It goes without saying that most are misinformed on these points; and the blame for this sad situation rests squarely on the Christian churches. And the primary reason for *that* fact is that Christianity emerged from a particular Jesus movement that not only had a *belief* orientation, but one strongly influenced in that belief system by the pagan Mysteries of the time. The fact that that particular Jesus movement thereby had some appeal to “gentiles” because of its similarities to paganism helped it grow in magnitude; and its “unJesuan” character gave it advantages as a state religion (first recognized by Constantine). Christianity, however—despite its claims to the contrary—does *not*, in fact, carry forth the religion of Jesus. Which is why those who value that religion come to reject Christianity once they recognize its false nature.

Not only reject Christianity but feel overwhelmingly saddened by the fact that the Christian churches are continuing on their merry way of misleading their congregants. Realizing at the same time, however, that it would not be enough simply to try to warn others that they enter a Christian church at their own risk—the risk of being misled, and thereby directed down the wrong path. Realizing, in addition, that they need to offer such people a clear alternative.

Those who come to this realization can be expected to arrive at different answers. Therefore, I recognize that it would be arrogant of me to declare that the answer that *I* have reached on the matter is the only possible answer. All I feel comfortable doing is to take the advice of the author of I Peter 4 in humbly offering my answer as one to consider. I have already presented the basics of my answer in my [“Worship”](#) on this web site. Below, I present the answer more briefly, but specifically from a Trinitarian perspective—the Trinity that *I* find meaningful.

My Trinity does not consist of Beings *per se*, nor is it oriented to belief. Rather, it consists of (a) an institution, (b) actions, and (c) prayer—all perceived as interrelated in an integral way.

The institution to which I am referring is the *New Word Fellowship*, discussed in detail in “Worship.” Here I need say only that participation in a Fellowship can have a great variety of consequences for those participating (as I detail in “Worship”), including original ideas generated by the group and achievement of a “high” on the part of some, or all, participants. I single out these two possible consequences because some participants might very well perceive the Holy Spirit involved in both: the Holy Spirit as transmitting revelations to participants (individually and collectively) in the form of creative ideas or novel understandings; the Holy Spirit as “possessing” some or all members, thereby changing (temporarily at least) their personalities.

The *actions* I am referring to can be thought of as ones relating to the “plan of salvation” passage in Matthew 25 (that refers to feeding the hungry, etc.). This part of my Trinity is related to the first in that Fellowship sessions often likely would result in ideas for possible actions—ones that might be engaged in by individual participants acting as individuals and/or ones engaged in by individual participants acting in concert with other participants (or even others who are not part of that Fellowship, or any Fellowship for that matter). “Actions” should, I would add, be thought of in broad terms, so that it includes not only actions that directly help others, but actions with potential for indirectly contributing to the well-being of others—in the future, if not “here-and-now.” Thus, doing research, writing, contacting political and other leaders to convey suggestions to them—these are all examples of other kinds of actions that should be included under the general heading “actions.”

Prayer is herein thought of as communing with God; as such, it is a personal—and private—relationship that one establishes with that which one conceives of as God. Given this concept of the nature of prayer, I object strongly to *public* prayers—whether used in churches or at secular public events. Such use of prayer misconstrues, in my mind, the nature of prayer—and borders on the blasphemous, in my view. Needless to say, by no means am I an advocate of prayers in public schools (presented, i.e., by some one individual to an audience). Nor, even, am I an advocate of “saying grace” at meals in one’s home—for, again, this misconstrues the nature of prayer—and in effect makes a mockery of prayer. Wasn’t it enough that *Jesus* was mocked by Roman soldiers before being executed?!

What prayer *should* be “about” is asking God for guidance, understanding, enlightenment—and for offering thanks. Therefore, petitionary prayers are not in themselves objectionable; the key, however, is to petition only for that which can help one lead a better life. I hesitate, however, to provide any sort of definitive answer to the question of what one should, and should not, pray for—because none of us *can* give such an answer. I would add only that praying “out loud” is recommended (assuming that one can do so in private—e.g., while taking a walk in the park). And that one consider the possibility of engaging in the “meditative” prayer technique developed by L. Robert Keck (see my “Worship” for a citation).

The ideal religious life involves all three—Fellowship participation, action, and prayer. Unfortunately, currently we are deprived of a full religious life because of the absence of New Word Fellowships. Therefore, the reader is encouraged to take the initiative and create such a

Fellowship in his/her area. If, however, one does not feel “called” to do this, there are always the other two components of the Trinity identified above.

If one attends a Christian church, does their perverted nature mean that one should *cease* attending? Perhaps. However, if one continues to attend, but recognizes *how* they are perverted, this can be beneficial to one’s religious development—for this can contribute to one’s becoming ever more aware of what should *not* be done, and thereby help one clarify for oneself what *should* be. Perhaps, indeed, continued church attendance can so increase one’s awareness of the evil perpetrated by the typical Christian church that one will resolve to create a New Word Fellowship, in spite of the apparent barriers that prevent one from so doing!

Jesuanism in an Urban Context

James B. Gray

A part of Felicitas D. Goodman's discussion of religion (*in Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality*, 1988) is a series of chapters (5 – 9) which discuss how religion varies from one type of society to another. (The relevant chapter titles are, successively, The Hunter-Gatherers, The Horticulturalists, The Agriculturalists, The Nomadic Pastoralists, and The City Dwellers.) In organizing her discussion on this basis she was not suggesting that different types of religion create different types of societies but, rather, that societal development occurs apart from any religious influence, and that as societal change occurs, the nature of religion changes—and in an adaptational sense. This thesis is, of course, in conflict with the (Max) Weberian thesis regarding the relationship between the rise of Protestantism and capitalism; yet given the spatio-temporal perspective used by Goodman, it would seem that her thesis has rather firm empirical support.

Insofar as her thesis *does* have such support, the suggestion is that, e.g., not only *has* Christianity changed over the past 2,000 years in response to societal changes, but that such change is *inevitable*—such change *must* occur. Which implies, further, that the nature of religion in the United States currently is no accident: it reflects the societal change, because it is causatively dependent on that societal situation. So that, for example, the fact that many Christian denominations are present in our society reflects a societal “need” that those various denominations exist.

One would not expect there to be perfect adjustment in our society between the nature of the society and its “religion set,” for the infusion of people from other cultures (whether from Mexico or Jamaica or southeast Asia, etc.) into our society reduces the strength of the relationship. But if that infusion were to cease, Goodman's prediction (seemingly) is that over time the degree of adjustment would increase until eventually it became perfect.

Goodman's thesis (as I have presented it, at any rate) may be overly deterministic, mechanistic. But the relationship that she posits between societal characteristics (thought of especially in *economic* terms) and religious ones would seem to have a rather strong basis in reality. Therefore, it is a thesis that should be taken seriously by anyone (like myself) interested in promoting new religious ideas (as I do, e.g., in “[Worship](#)”). My interest here, however, is not so much to comment on Goodman's presentation as to address two questions:

- Must we resign ourselves to a religion situation (i.e., the current one) such that religion simply serves the needs of the Existing Order (dominated as it is by its Economy component)?
- If the religious situation cannot be changed without changing the nature of the society (given that it is a dependent variable, and the nature of the society the independent variable), should we, then, make an effort to change the society—for the sake of getting a better religious situation, among other reasons? And if so, what can/should be done to bring about societal system change?

Goodman commented, regarding ethical matters, that (p. 167): “Because of the shifting, impermanent relationships in the city that provide little social control for the individual, moral decisions are made on the basis of what serves a person’s immediate needs. To ask whether an action is good or evil would in most instances be unrealistic.” Thus, Goodman implied that one could just as well forget about a “Jesuan” ethic (e.g., that contained in Matthew 25) in an urban context, because it simply isn’t realistic to expect urban dwellers to follow that ethic: the environment they live in (physical, social, intellectual, etc.) is such as to virtually prevent people from following it, even if they want to. (And I might add that if one develops a habit of *not* following that ethic, one soon will not even *value* it.)

An additional problem noted by Goodman relative to ethics is that (p. 168) “urban society is faced daily with questions about ethics for which no one has any answer, because technical and scientific development has long outstripped the ability of this type of society to formulate any relevant moral code.” Thus, although sociologist E. A. Ross had argued in 1907 (*Sin and Society*, republished 1973) that (p. 40) “We need an annual supplement to the Decalogue,” Goodman’s response presumably would be: “In the first place, such updating would not be easy to accomplish; and in the second place, even were it easy to accomplish such updating, what would be the point in doing so? For the situation within which urban people live is such to have a far more powerful effect on their behavior than an up-to-date moral code.”

The reason I have brought Felicitas Goodman into my discussion here is that much of her research career was devoted to the study of “possession”—and its persistence, in one form or another historically and cross-culturally. That this phenomenon was associated with the early Jesus movement is a fact generally given little attention, and even suppressed. Fortunately, however, Stevan L. Davies, in his *brilliant Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* (1995) has had the courage to address this seemingly taboo topic—which fact I appreciate, given that I unashamedly discuss the possibility of Holy Spirit possession in “Worship.”

The fact that I write appreciatively about Spirit possession in “Worship” should be interpreted as suggesting that I do not accept the deterministic viewpoint of Goodman—the suggestion that the religion situation in our society necessarily reflects the “needs” of the society. If that relationship were strictly true, this would mean to me that we are caught in a trap from which we cannot escape—the “trap” that I am referring to being that of “runaway” resulting from “global warming.” “Runaway” such that adaptation to it would not be possible while it was occurring (because of the associated chaotic conditions); nor possible to enable survival upon its reaching completion (i.e., achievement of a new equilibrium).

The “faith” that I have is that we are not doomed. That if we humans act appropriately and quickly, there is the possibility that the threshold will not be crossed that would usher in runaway.

What constitutes “appropriate” action? Whereas I would not discourage others from searching for alternate sources of energy that would be non-polluting (or virtually so), I’m convinced that our “salvation” does not lie in that direction. Rather, I believe that the answer is societal system change in a cooperative eco-community direction, and that the New Word Fellowship (see my “Worship”) can be a vehicle for generating ideas regarding how to go about accomplishing such

change. That the Fellowship looks to God (or the Holy Spirit, if one prefers) for “current revelation”—and thereby is related to “Quaker” practice—is what especially gives me hope that the Fellowship can be an effective tool in helping bring about change.

Those who look to God to “save” us are making a serious mistake, I believe. If we are to be “saved,” it will be through *our* efforts. This is anything but a “Godless” assertion, however, in that my fundamental assumption is that our efforts will be rooted in “current revelation” from God. *Successful* efforts, that is.

Poverty and Scale

James B. Gray

Let me begin by asking the reader to answer a question that does not directly relate to poverty but, rather, to power/influence: “As you look around within your ‘world,’ and ask yourself—‘Do the individuals in my world all have the *same* influence or, rather, do I perceive variation in influence?’—what is your answer?” Given that people *do* vary in any number of respects, one should not at all be surprised if the answer to this question regarding influence—provided by *anyone*—would be “It is obvious to me that power/influence varies from person to person.” And if we would then ask anyone what factors explain (they believe) why there is such variation, they are likely to answer:

- Some have a personality that gives them more influence than others.
- Some have a speaking gift—i.e., they are “quick on their feet,” have abundant information available at their fingertips, are eloquent, etc.—that gives them more influence than others.
- Men—because they tend to be more assertive—tend to have more influence than women.
- Older people, because of their greater experience, tend to have more influence than younger people.
- On the other hand, many younger people have more education than their elders, and thereby have more influence than older people.
- A person with a high position in an organization has more influence than a person lower in the organization—simply because power/influence goes with “height” of position.
- Wealth equals power/influence, in that the more wealth one has, the more influence one can wield; and the more influence one *can* wield, the more one *does*, in fact, tend to wield.
- Etc.

Whereas factors such as the above can legitimately be cited when our reference is to the local level of analysis, are those same factors operative if we change our “scale” of analysis drastically—from a local level to the global level? I would argue that a common mistake people make is assuming that the explanatory factors operative at one scale are also operative at a different scale. That is, most people are incapable (whether as a result of their educations or other factors) of recognizing that phenomena (such as influence) can be conceived at different scales, and that as one changes scale in analyzing a given phenomenon:

- *How* one conceives the given phenomenon (such as influence) will necessarily change.

- The *explanatory factors* that are operative will change—such that different sets of explanatory factors are operative at different scales.

One is most likely to be aware of these truths if (a) one has had experience undertaking rigorous empirical research—or at least is familiar with the “ins and outs” about doing empirical research with the use of numerical procedures (statistical ones in particular); or (b) one has had association with an academic discipline that either has a strong time component (e.g., history, historical geology) or strong spatial component (e.g., geography). This is why I suggested above (parenthetically) that the reason why one might not recognize the scale factor is that one’s education (or lack thereof) may not have made one aware of the factor. After all, the scale phenomenon is not something that is immediately obvious to the average “person on the street.”

If the task at hand is to examine power/influence at a *global* scale, the starting point is the “safe” assumption that power/influence *does* in fact vary at that scale. Having accepted that assumption as one with “obvious” empirical support, the first actual task, then, is to select an appropriate observational unit for one’s analysis. Let us assume that one selects the “region” as such a unit, decides on a set of regions such that each has a certain degree of internal uniformity (which is what makes it a region!)—and that the regions are such that some of them consist of groups of contiguous nation-states, some contain just one nation-state, and that still others are within nation-states (the nation-states in question containing two or more regions).

Given these observational units, what should we measure in each unit to express the magnitude of influence present in that unit? Should we “go” for a single measure in each unit or, rather, should we obtain a number of different measures and then somehow aggregate those measures (using, e.g., factor analysis)? We know that whatever we choose as our variable(s), it must be such that it is (a) capable of measurement in each of the observational units and (b) must exhibit variation from observational unit to observational unit. (For, after all, if a “variable” does not exhibit variation, it is not a variable! A characteristic that is a *constant* from observational unit to observational unit is, by definition, not a *variable*; and given that it is not a variable, it cannot have any influence on a *dependent* variable.)

Let us assume that we select, as our variable, “number of individuals with annual incomes above \$1 billion.” This number would be expected to vary from region to region (with values of “0” in some regions, of course), so that it would qualify as a variable. Note that most of the factors that we identified earlier as operative at a local scale would *not* qualify as variables for our current study: of the seven (7) factors identified in that discussion, only wealth and position within an organization would qualify as *possible* variables by virtue of exhibiting variability.

But just because the variable I have chosen exhibits variability from region to region, does that mean that it is a measure of influence? That is, just because Region A has more wealthy people (in absolute terms) than Region B, does it follow that there is more power/influence associated with Region A than Region B? And if so, *where* is that influence exerted? That is (regarding this latter question), is the influence associated with Region A exerted solely in Region A or, rather, does it “spill over” into other regions (as well—and not just contiguous such regions)?

Why think of “number of billionaires” (in a region) as a measure of power/influence?—as, in a sense, a “proxy” (or surrogate) for power/influence? Because most individuals who have

“fabulous” wealth have acquired it through their own efforts (rather than inherited it), and acquired it largely because they have been *driven* to acquire wealth. (*Why* they have been so driven—the influence of their parents, of their classmates, of the societal ethos, etc.—is not a matter that I will address here.) And insofar as “drivenness” is the key factor behind one’s wealth, because driven people are only in part interested in using their wealth to purchase things—instead having more of an interest in using their wealth to accomplish certain ends (such as acquiring still more wealth!)—the pursuit of those ends (whatever they might be) involves the exercise of power/influence. For example, an individual interested in acquiring ever more wealth may use his existing wealth to influence national elections and legislation (dealing with contracts, subsidies, tax policies, etc.).

Will the power/influence of the billionaires in a given region affect *only* individuals and institutions in the “home” region (i.e., the region within which the region’s billionaires have their “permanent” residence—as if the concept of “permanent residence” even has any meaning for billionaires!)? And if so, *what* will be affected in the “home” region?

As to the first question, there is absolutely *no* reason to expect that the influence of a given region’s billionaires will extend *only* to the “home” region. Although billionaires are scattered across the face of the earth (in terms of “permanent” place of residence—for all that concept’s worth), currently they are a part of a global elite. A global elite not so much in a statistical sense, but in the sense of a *sociological* group—i.e., a group with social, and not just business, ties (meeting annually in Davos, Switzerland, as one example). Thus, although it would be possible to perform a statistical analysis (using our regions as observational units) that would correlate number of billionaires in a region with other numerical values applicable to the region, such a statistical analysis would produce spurious—i.e., meaningless—results.

The fact that a *global* elite now exists is one of the most important facts about the contemporary world. For what this implies is that much, if not most, of what happens in the world today is the result of decisions made by this elite. Not that all decisions made by members of the elite are compatible one with another—for conflicts exist *within* the elite, not only between individuals, but segments. In general, however, members of the elite have common interests, so that internal conflicts are not such that the actions of one member or group cancel out the actions of other members/groups.

I have entitled this essay “Poverty and Scale,” so it’s about time that I comment on the first half of the title—the existence of poverty! I have brought in the matter of scale here because of the tendency of people to offer explanations of poverty based on their experience of the local area—the orientation of their minds to the local scale. If one’s focus, in explaining poverty, is on the local scale, one will quite naturally—and correctly—bring in such factors as laziness, income/class of parents, education, drive (i.e., “gumption”), etc. However, it is important to keep in mind that factors that explain at the local level do not necessarily explain at a higher level—such as the global level. If our focus is on the global level, we had best, in fact, forget what we know about causal factors operating on the local level.

At the global level the best explanation for the existence of poverty is that the global elite has made decisions which caused it in the first place, and continue to make decisions which help perpetuate it. Decisions made with the intent of furthering their own interests—and having,

among their incidental impacts, implications for world poverty. Even efforts on the elite's part to *address* world poverty have often “backfired” because they could not remove their own self-interest from the equation and/or they have been ignorant as how best to address the problem (to *reduce*, if not *solve*, it, that is).

If it is not common knowledge that the elite is responsible for world poverty—and when is the last time you read a newspaper or magazine article arguing this?!—this reflects not the truth of the matter but, rather, the fact that the media are businesses operated to earn a profit for their owners/managers, *not* operated to dispense truths. As a consequence, the media are little more than vehicles for advertisements and propaganda—withholding important facts, creating issues and thereby affecting people's opinions (e.g., their making an issue of Rev. Jeremiah Wright's statements—all of which are true, by the way), presenting half-truths, and even presenting outright lies (such as the “fact” of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction).

Don't expect the mass media to say much about the global elite—negative or positive—because the media themselves are controlled by members of the elite. Expect, rather, that the media, if they give any attention to world poverty at all, will explain it on the basis other than elite decision-making. Which means that we are faced with two major problems currently: (a) the fact of elite dominance, and (b) the fact that elite dominance of the media means that most people are ill- and misinformed.

What's the answer? Only societal system change. How to bring that about? The only answer that I have to offer is: “*Create New World Fellowships, and use them*” (see my “[Worship](#)”).

On Becoming a Christian: The (Confused) Perspective of Acts

James B. Gray

The book of Acts purports to be an historical account of the rise of Christianity—in the West, at any rate. However, given that it was written at a time (the latter part of the first century CE, presumably) when considerable diversity still existed within the Jesus Movement, and that fact was suppressed by the author, one has good reason to question the motives of that author (generally agreed to be the same person as the one who wrote the gospel of Luke). Indeed, given the situation of the Jesus Movement at the time of Acts's writing, there is good reason to believe that Acts was written as a sort of "recruitment poster." That is, it appears that the author believed it useful, given his purpose of attracting people to a *particular strand* of the Jesus Movement, to write a pseudo-history. Not just a pseudo-history, however, but one that would subtly convey to the reader/hearer the steps involved in "becoming a Christian"—"Christian," that is, as conceived by the writer (whom I will refer to as "Luke," even though the author's name is not known).

Unfortunately, insofar as the author had this latter intent, and presented his "instructions" in the form of alleged examples of "conversion," he did not fulfill his purpose very well. For when the various sets of "instructions" offered in Acts are examined closely, and compared one with another, the following problems become evident:

- If one compares a given set of instructions with any other set, one finds a few pairs identical (or virtually so), but finds that most pairs are different.
- The differences in pairs are not only in *number* of "steps" comprising each member of the pair in question, but differences in *content*. If the former is true, the latter must also be true, of course. But even if the number of steps is the same in a given pair, the *content* may still differ.
- The fact of a difference in content within a given pair implies that the *total* number of steps involved in *all* sets of instructions exceeds the number of points in any given set of instructions. This, in turn, suggests that *each* set of instructions is *incomplete* (so far as explicit instructions are concerned, at any rate).
- That "fact" raises a problem: If we assume that a given set of instructions is incomplete, are we justified in supplying some, or all, of the missing steps? In some cases one might argue that this is justified, but in other cases one might conclude in the negative. (For example, one might conclude regarding a given set of instructions that it "skips" some given step deliberately as, e.g., being unnecessary).
- This latter possibility raises the further possibility that the sets of instructions comprising some given pair are not only *different*, but in *conflict* one with another. Insofar as we find conflict, how should we explain it? One possibility, of course, is that one set of instructions is attributed to Peter, another to Paul (so that the differences are explained on the basis that Peter thought differently than Paul). But what if we find that some of the instructions

attributed to Paul differ with *other* such of his instructions?!

In short, insofar as the book of Acts is viewed as an “instruction manual,” its presentation is muddled—and *that* fact represents a serious problem for the book. One wonders, in fact, why Acts was included in the “New Testament” given its problematic nature!

At any rate, I deem it of value to provide evidence for my assertion that Acts does not provide a clear set of instructions regarding how to become a “Christian”—and do so below. The underlying assumptions of my presentation here are that (a) the author of Acts was writing for a *contemporary* audience (*not* for us moderns, it goes without saying), (b) his motive was to attract others to a particular strand of the Jesus Movement (which is why he wrote a “history”²⁶¹), and (c) that he wanted to write his “history” in such a way as subtly to instruct others concerning the steps that *he* regarded as necessary in the process of “becoming a Christian.” I say “subtly” because the author did not *explicitly* offer such instructions in his book but, rather, discussed alleged real-world cases of people becoming converted to (his version of) Christianity.

I perceive twenty (20) sets of “instructions” in Acts, and have created a chart (below) which identifies the totality of steps—ten (10) in number—associated with the various sets of instructions. Those 10 steps form the column heads of the chart given below (next page); they are as follows:

- Believe (that Jesus is Messiah).
- Repent (of your sins).
- Turn away (from your sins) Toward God (i.e., God’s Law).
- (God will then) Forgive (you if you do).
- (You may experience the) Feeling (that your sins have been forgiven).
- (If you do, undertake the ritual of water) Baptism (in recognition of the feeling that your sins have been “washed away.”)
- (The Spirit may then come to) Indwell (in you).
- [(A laying on of) Hands.]
- [Prayer.]
- (If you become filled with the Holy Spirit, your) Behavior (will be affected).

261 At that time—unlike ours—being “the latest and greatest” was not valued.

"INSTRUCTIONS" / "FORMULAE" IN ACTS

	<i>Chapter</i>			Turn Away/ Toward							
	<i>Verse(s)</i>	Believe	Repent		Forgive	Feeling	Baptism	Indwell	Hands	Prayer	Behavior
1	2:1 - 6							A⇒			B
2	2:33							A			
3	2:38			A	C		⇔B⇔	C			
4	3:1 - 8	A⇒									B
5	3:19, 20		A	B⇒	C⇒	D?		D?			
6	4:8							A⇒			B

	<i>Chapter</i>			Turn Away/ Toward							
	<i>Verse(s)</i>	Believe	Repent		Forgive	Feeling	Baptism	Indwell	Hands	Prayer	Behavior
7	4:31							B⇒		⇐A	C
8	5:30, 31	A?	B⇒		C						
9	8:15 - 17							B	⇐A		
10	8:36 - 39	A?					B				
11	9:17, 18							A⇒			B
12	9:32 - 34							A⇒?			B
13	:36 - 41							A⇒?			B

<i>Chapter Verse(s)</i>		Believe	Repent	Turn Away/ Toward	Forgive	Feeling	Baptism	Indwell	Hands	Prayer	Behavior
14	10:38 - 44	A⇒			B						
15	10:45-48						B⇒	⇐A			C
16	13:38, 39	A⇒				B?					
17	14:10	A⇒						A⇒			B
18	19:2 - 6							B⇒	⇐A		C
19	26:20		A	B							C
20								A			B

The letters in the cells represent “steps,” with “A” being the first step, etc. A question mark next to a letter indicates that there is some question as to whether that step is, in fact, associated with the passage in question. An “arrow” symbol (\Rightarrow) indicates that a causal relationship is (seemingly) implied, with the direction of the arrow indicating the direction of causation (so far as the columns of the table are concerned).

It’s true that the *appearance* of the chart that follows is (possibly) a function, in part, of my use of the *Good News Bible*—and that had I used some other translation, it’s entirely possible that the chart would have a somewhat different appearance. Ideally, this would not occur, but one should not be surprised if it does—translators being only human. Despite this possibility of differently-appearing charts with different translations, it still is of interest how, with a *given* translation (*Good News* in this case), the “instructions” given or implied in the following passages lack consistency one with another. Following, then, are the 20 sets of “instructions,” with comments.

1. Acts 2:1 - 6: After Jesus’s (alleged) ascension to Heaven, and Matthias was chosen (by lot) to succeed (the now-dead) Judas Ascariot, the “believers” gathered “in one place” on the day of Pentecost. Suddenly, there was a noise “like a strong wind blowing,” and there appeared “tongues of fire which spread out and touched each person there. They were all [thereby] filled with Holy Spirit and [therefore?] began to talk in other languages.” In doing so, they were understood by others nearby, because it happened that Jews from many different lands were present in Jerusalem at that time [the Jewish Diaspora having begun many decades earlier].

What’s notable here is that the individuals, in this scene, to whom Spirit-filling was granted had done nothing immediately prior to the arrival of the “tongues of fire”—except to gather together. Which suggests that a gathering of “believers” has, in itself, potential for “attracting” the Holy Spirit—a principle that the New Word Fellowship (see my “[Worship](#)”) takes to heart. What’s odd about the scene (a fact that will become clearer as the discussion progresses below) is that such activities as repentance and water baptism had not immediately preceded the Spirit-filling event. One is almost led to believe that the Spirit-filling was given to these particular individuals merely because they had been disciples/followers of Jesus: it was their *status* which made them eligible for Spirit-filling, rather than specific actions/decisions on their part.

Another odd part of the scene is that the only thing the Holy Spirit did for these people on this occasion was to cause them to “speak in tongues”—something which, in itself, has no ethical content.²⁶² In fact, the passage doesn’t even say *what* they said! The only significance that “speaking in tongues” has in this passage is that others, from other lands, are present to hear—and understand—what everyone says. The implication here seems to be that these individuals, present in Jerusalem for Pentecost, might then want to

262 Note that Paul—e.g., in Galatians 5:22, 23—*did* associate behavioral changes with Spirit-filling; and in I Corinthians 14:3, 4 attributed little importance to speaking in tongues (i.e., glossalalia).

learn about the new movement, and take it with them back home. However, Luke gives no indication that any of them did this!

2. Acts 2:33: After the speaking in tongues had occurred, these foreigners were (2:12) “Amazed and confused, . . . [and] kept asking each other, ‘What does this mean?’” [Luke must have been quite a linguist to know this!] Some of them, however, “made fun of the believers, saying, ‘These people are drunk!’” [Evidently Luke was able to obtain translations from informers that he had in the crowd!] Peter, however, then “stood up with the other eleven apostles (Mathias now being a part of the group), and began an explanatory speech. In the course of the speech he stated that Jesus was Messiah, that Messiah received the Holy Spirit from God, his Father, and that (2:33) “What you now see and hear is his gift that he has poured out on us.”

The only point that I wish to make regarding this passage is that Peter refers to the Holy Spirit having been “poured” on them. What this seems to allude to is water baptism, in the sense of “baptism with the Holy Spirit.” Oddly, however, Luke has Peter, in this passage, refer to the “pouring” as having been done by Jesus rather than God. Perhaps Luke was saying that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit *on behalf of* God, on God=s instructions (?).

3. Acts 2:38: Near the end of his speech (in which Peter virtually accuses those present in the audience of killing Jesus—even the foreigners present!), “Peter said to them, ‘Each one of you must turn away from his sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God’s gift, the Holy Spirit.’”

Here, at last, are some *actual* instructions (as opposed to the *implied* ones identified so far)! Peter tells members of a particular audience—whom he has virtually accused of being murderers—to (1) turn away from your sins (without first repenting of them?), (2) become baptized (but specifically in the name of Jesus Christ), and *then* (3) God will forgive you of your sins. So that repentance on one’s part does not automatically lead to forgiveness on God=s part; rather, to receive forgiveness one must first resolve to turn away from one’s sinning and then become baptized: baptism is not, in this passage, seen as something one subjects oneself to in order to symbolize that one feels as if one’s sins have been washed away by God. Baptism, rather, *results* in one’s sins being forgiven by God; and, furthermore, also results in one becoming Spirit-filled (at the same time?²⁶³). This “formula” does not *contradict* the previous two—it is merely *different* from them. It *is*, however, inconsistent with others of the formulae discussed below.

4. Acts 3:1 - 8: Peter and John, on their way to the Temple, encounter a man, by the Beautiful Gate, who had been lame all his life. When he saw Peter and John, he begged them to give something to him; Peter told him that he had no money, but that he would give him what he had. He then ordered the man, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

263 I assume so here. As a consequence, note, regarding the chart, that the “B” has an arrow symbol on either side, and that step “C” appears twice to indicate simultaneity in effects.

to get up and walk. Taking the man by the hand, Peter helped him up, and the an started walking around. Peter did not then claim that he had healed the man. Rather, he said (v. 16): “It was the power of his [Jesus’s] name that gave strength to this lame man. What you see and know was done by faith in his name; it was faith in Jesus that has made him well, as you can all see.”

Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and presumably was still so filled, but Peter did not here attribute a healing power to that possession. Rather, he stated that it was his (i.e., Peter=s) *faith* in “his [Jesus=s] name” that resulted in the healing of the man. However, one could argue that it was Peter=s being filled with the Holy Spirit that enabled him to have the faith that (Peter said, in this story of Luke) brought about the man’s healing. That is, the lame man may have been so convinced that Peter was going to heal him (because Peter, in being Spirit-filled, was charismatic), that physiological processes were set in motion in his body, resulting in a psychosomatic healing of his lameness.

5. Acts 3:19, 20: Shortly after this “healing” incident Peter told his listeners that he knew that what they and their leaders had done to Jesus (i.e., had him crucified) was done out of their ignorance: they sincerely believed that Jesus was not Messiah. Indeed, Peter went on to declare (v. 18): “God announced long ago that his Messiah had to suffer, and he made it come true this way.” But despite the fact that Peter had seemingly thereby absolved his listeners of guilt, he went on to say (vs. 19, 20): “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that he will forgive your sins. If you do, times of spiritual strength^[264] will come from the Lord, and he will [later] send Jesus [from his current abode in Heaven], who is the Messiah he has already chosen for you.”

The “formula” offered here is that the starting point is to repent (of one’s sins)Bi.e., become regretful, sorrowful of your sins. Next, turn to God (resolve that you will attempt to live a Godly life—i.e., one in accord with the Law). God will then forgive your sins (“wipe the slate clean,” “wash away your sins”), and you be given a feeling of “spiritual strength.” The chart above has a “D” in both the “Feeling” and “Indwell” columns, each followed by a A?@ to indicate that it is not clear here whether Peter/Luke is referring *just* to a subjective feeling (suggested by the Revised Standard’s use of the word “refreshing”) or (also) to the empowerment associated with Spirit-indwelling.

6. Acts 4:8: Peter and John were arrested because (v. 2) they “were teaching the people that Jesus had risen from death, which proved that the dead will rise to life.” And the next day were required to stand before various dignitaries and answer questions. Peter, (v. 8) “full of the Holy Spirit answered them”—*boldly* evidently, because (v. 13) “The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were and to learn that they were ordinary mean of no education.”

264 The Revised Standard version uses the phrase “times of refreshing” here.

The impression is given here that although Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, during this encounter with the dignitaries he became even *more* filled with the Holy Spirit—this enabling him to speak with boldness to these individuals. The suggestion, then, is that there are *degrees* of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and that what Spirit-filling enables one to do depends on “how much” indwelling exists. What=s odd here is that Luke gives the impression that Peter was more Spirit-filled during this encounter than he was in the encounter with the lame man, yet in this case he was only able to speak boldly whereas in the previous encounter he was able to facilitate a healing!

7. Acts 4:31: After Peter and John were freed, they rejoined their group of “believers,” and all joined together in prayer to God. “When then finished praying, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God’s message with boldness.”

As with Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to all members of a group simultaneously, and did so in conjunction with a commotionBa noise like “a strong wind blowing” on Pentecost, and a shaking in this case. However, the Spirit’s coming in this case was preceded by prayer on the part of all members of the group, whereas no causal significance was identified for this occurrence on Pentecost. And in this latter case the result of the Spirit-filling was bold proclamation of “God’s message,” whereas in the Pentecost case the result was speaking in tongues. What Luke fails to tell us in this latter case is *what*, exactly, constituted “God=s Message” (was it, e.g., that Jesus was Messiah?), and *who* that message was directed to. In fact, Luke seemingly suggests that they were simply proclaiming this message to one another!

8. Acts 5:30, 31: Peter, in a later speech, stated: “The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from death, after you had killed him by nailing him to a cross. God raised him to his right side as Leader and Savior, to give the people of Israel the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven.”

What Luke seems to be saying here, through Peter, is that the raising (by God, of course) of Jesus from the dead proves that Jesus is Messiah, and that this means that God will arrive soon to establish His kingdom. This gives you an opportunity, prior to that event, to repent of your sins (after, that is, you have come to believe that Jesus *is* Messiah²⁶⁵); and if you do so, you can be assured that God will forgive your sins—thereby making you ready for God=s imminent appearance. Oddly, there is no reference here to becoming baptized (immersed), or to the possibility of becoming filled with the Holy Spirit.

9. Acts 8:15 - 17: “When they [Peter and John] arrived [in Samaria, to meet with believers there], they prayed for the believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized [i.e.,

265 Because such an interpretation is not certain, on the chart I use “A?” rather than “A”.

immersed in water—specifically *stream* water?] in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

In this scene we have believers in Samaria who had received water baptism from someone, but had not yet been “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” To remedy this deficiency, Peter and John first prayed that these people might receive the Holy Spirit, and then placed their hands on them. As they did so, those touched received the Holy Spirit.

One can assume (although Luke does not state as much) that these individuals all believed that Jesus was Messiah, had repented of their sins, and had resolved to turn toward God. And that they had then wanted to become baptized in water to symbolize that they believed that their sins had been washed away by God. For some reason, however, as a result of that water baptism none of them came to experience Spirit-filling. Peter and John then somehow determined that God would send His Spirit if they first prayed for such sending, and then placed hands on these believers. This they did, and all experienced indwelling by the Holy Spirit. Nothing is said in the passage, however, regarding how (if at all) that Spirit-indwelling affected the *behavior* of those individuals.

10. Acts 8:36 - 39: This passage describes the encounter that Philip had with the Ethiopian official. The official had asked Philip what a passage in Isaiah, containing the “He was like a sheep that is taken to be slaughtered, like a lamb . . .” passage meant, and Philip then explained it to him, using an historical approach that began with the Isaiah passage and ended with (v. 35) “the Good News about Jesus.” The passage continues: “As they traveled down the road, they came to a place where there was some water, and the official said, ‘Here is some water. What is to keep me from being baptized?’ The official ordered the carriage to stop, and both Philip and the official went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.”

One can assume that prior to this baptism, the official declared his belief that Jesus was/is Messiah. In fact, a footnote in my Bible indicates that some manuscripts actually state that. The official must have believed that he should be baptized to symbolize his new commitment, but Philip must not have informed him that when one is baptized, there is the possibility that one will become Spirit-filled—for there is no reference for such filling having occurred. Oddly, there *is* here reference in this passage to the Spirit, but only that the Spirit “took Philip away”—and the official did not see him subsequent to the baptism!

11. Acts 9:17, 18: In this passage Ananias says to the blinded (on the road to Damascus) Saul (later to be named Paul): “‘He [God] sent me [to you] so that you might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ At once something like fish scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he was able to see again. He stood up and was baptized; and after he had eaten, his strength came back.”

This Ananias is referred to (v. 10) as “a Christian in Damascus,” and may very well have been a Spirit-filled person; the text, however, does not state as much. The text says simply that when Ananias came into Paul’s presence, and announced to him that God had

sent him, Paul regained his sight. The story implies that at that particular point in time Paul became a believer—i.e., came to believe that Jesus was/is Messiah. And then felt a need to repent of his sins, and become baptized. There is also the suggestion here that Paul was led to believe that water baptism had causal efficacy—but for what? To cause God to “wash away” his sins? To open up the opportunity of becoming Spirit-filled? Oddly, although Ananias had said to Paul that God had sent him that Paul might “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” there is no reference in the passage to Paul having actually *become* filled with the Spirit! Also, the instantaneous “conversion” that occurs in this story is not only unbelievable to anyone who has any life experience, but contrary to what Paul says in his own letters!

12. Acts 9:32 - 34: “Peter traveled everywhere, and on one occasion he went to visit God’s people who lived in Lydda [west of Jerusalem]. There he met a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had not been able to get out of bed for eight years. ‘Aeneas,’ Peter said to him. ‘Jesus Christ makes you well. Get up and make your bed.’ At once Aeneas got up.”

We can assume that Peter was, in this scene, Spirit-filled, having experienced Spirit-filling at Pentecost, but the healing of this man is not attributed to Peter’s being Spirit-filled. Rather, Peter declares that Jesus Christ—i.e., Jesus the *Messiah*—makes you well. Does he mean here that Jesus, now in Heaven, will use His power to heal him? Or, rather, does he mean that if you *believe* that Jesus is Messiah, God will heal you? Evidently the latter: healing is dependent upon belief; God can heal any time He wants to, but refrains from doing so until the person in question expresses belief that Jesus is Messiah. And then repents, resolves to change one’s ways, and becomes baptized? Evidently not, because there is no indication in the passage that the paralyzed man did anything but believe that Jesus was Messiah. In fact, one can very reasonably argue that all the man did was follow Peter’s instructions!

13. Acts 9:36 - 41: While Peter was in Lydda, some people from nearby Joppa learned of this fact, and because a believer there named Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek) had just died, (v. 38) “they sent two men to him with the message, ‘Please hurry and come to us.’”—without, however, explaining why, evidently! At any rate, Peter *did* go with them, and upon arrival was taken to an upstairs room where the body had been laid. Peter then ordered those (widows all) present out of the room, “knelt down and prayed; then he turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up!’ She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter reached over and helped her get up.”

Was Tabitha brought back to life because Peter, in being Spirit-filled, had special powers. Or did Peter’s prayer cause God to bring her back to life, so that Peter’s Spirit-filling was irrelevant? Or did God listen to Peter’s prayer (and raise Tabitha) because Peter was Spirit-filled? There is no way of knowing what Luke was trying to tell us here. All we know is that Peter prayed to God, and that God then brought Tabitha back to life. This is why “A☞?” appears on the chart above under “Indwell.”

14. Acts 10:38 - 44: In another speech, Peter notes, regarding Jesus, that (v. 38) “God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power,” seemingly referring to Spirit-filling as equivalent to water baptism (as many thought of it)—in that it was an active agent that empowered. Peter goes on to note that after Jesus had become Spirit-filled, he (v. 38) “went everywhere, doing good and healing all who were under the power of the Devil, for God was with him.” Peter continued by saying (v. 43) “that everyone who believes in him will have his sins forgiven through the power of his name.” Verse 44 then states: “While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who were listening to his message” (including on the Gentiles present, v. 45 adds).

Evidently Peter was saying here that anyone (but by this he actually meant any *Jews*) who believed that Jesus was/is Messiah would thereby have their sins forgiven—even if they had not first repented, and then resolved to live thenceforth according to God’s Law! Nor is there any reference here to the desirability of becoming water baptized. Rather, Luke simply states that while Peter was speaking, all those present were filled with the Holy Spirit—and Luke says nothing regarding whether this had any impact on the behavior of the *Jews* present who were so filled. (The Gentiles are referred to in the next passage.)

15. Acts 10:45 - 48: “The Jewish believers who had come from Joppa with Peter were amazed that God had poured out his gift of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles also. For they heard them [i.e., the Gentiles] speaking in strange tongues and praising God=s greatness. Peter spoke up; ‘These people have received the Holy Spirit, just as we also did. Can anyone, then, stop them from being baptized with water?’ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Here we have a filling of the Holy Spirit occurring (presumably because of belief that had just occurred that Jesus was/is Messiah²⁶⁶), and baptism occurring *afterwards*. Why was water baptism necessary here, given that these Gentiles had already received the Spirit?! And why weren=t the Jews who had experienced Spirit-filling *also* baptized? I don’t know what Luke was thinking here—except to say that what strikes me about this passage is that it appears to have been invented by Luke as a literary device to help attract Gentiles to the new movement. That view is reinforced by the fact that the “speaking in strange tongues” reported here calls to mind Pentecost, the pivotal day for the new movement given that “it all began” (so they say) on that day. This passage can be thought of as reassuring Gentiles that it is as possible for them to receive the Holy Spirit as Jews—that, in fact, the “steps” that they need to go through for Spirit-filling might very well be different (easier) for them than for Jews.

16. Acts 13:38, 39: In a speech Paul says: “All of you, my fellow Israelites, are to know for sure that the message about forgiveness of sins is preached to you; you are to know that everyone who believes in him is set free from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free.”

266 I have not, though, placed my AA@ in the ABelieve@ column of the chart.

Several comments are in order here, beginning with Paul's (actually, Luke's Paul *character*) assertion that the Law of Moses could not set a person free. A reader of this assertion who was familiar with Judaism would have puzzled over this assertion, and might have responded: "Why on earth would *anyone* think of the Law of Moses as setting one free from sin?! It should be obvious to anyone with normal intelligence that the Law of Moses *identifies* what's sinful; in itself it does not—obviously—set one free from sin. It *does* only in the sense that for certain offenses certain sacrifices are specified to atone for the sin in question. But to say that the Law of Moses sets one free from sin is true only in that very limited sense."

It's true that Paul, in his letters, referred to Jesus's execution as a sacrifice that served to atone for "our" sins; but in this passage in Luke's Acts, that viewpoint of Paul is not brought out (although one, I suppose, can argue that it is *implicit* in the passage). Rather, there is reference to "believing in" Jesus, and the forgiveness of sins—but no reference to the Holy Spirit, or to water baptism, etc. The passage presents a Pauline theology (at least implicitly), and there are two facts of interest regarding *that* fact. First, it is a point of view that *Luke* did not accept. Second, it is a point of view that few *Jews* would accept—or even Gentiles, for that matter. Luke may have been trying to be accurate here in giving Paul words that were consistent with his (i.e., *Paul's*) theology; but in doing so, Luke did nothing to advance *his* own cause of making the new movement attractive to Gentiles.

As to the "formula" offered here by Luke's Paul, it seems to be that if one believes that Jesus is Messiah, one will obtain a feeling of being set free. But does "Paul" mean here that one will sense that one's sins have been forgiven or, rather, that one will become Spirit-filled—and thereby have a feeling of being set free? Given that "Paul" says nothing in this passage regarding asking for forgiveness and resolving to change one's ways, it appears that the "freedom" that he is referring to is not a freedom from sin—despite the fact that that's what *Luke* has him say. But neither does Luke's Paul appear to be saying here that the feeling involved here is the result of being Spirit-filled—for there is no reference here to Spirit-possession²⁶⁷ (nor to water baptism, etc.). Thus, the words given to Paul in this passage are in *partial* agreement with what he wrote in his letters, but *only* partial agreement. Given that Luke was not in general agreement with Paul's theology, was Luke here deliberately attempting to present a garbled version of Paul's theology? Did Luke give prominence to Paul in Acts, not because he was in general agreement with Paul's theology but, rather, because he knew that he could not *avoid* doing so, given Paul's prominent role as a missionizer?

17. Acts 14:10: A crippled man in Lystra is told to stand by Paul, and the man then jumped up and started to walk. Prior to this, Paul (v. 9) "saw that he believed and [therefore?] could be healed" What we seem to have here is a combination of belief on the part

267 However, Paul's letters seem to indicate that *Paul* thought of there being a feeling of freedom associated with the experience of being Spirit-filled. Luke, rather, seemed to relate Spirit-filling to water baptism, using John the Baptizer's baptism of Jesus as his model.

of the crippled man and Spirit-indwelling on the part of Paul, the result being healing of the man.

What's odd about the passage, however, is that the crippled man is identified as a "believer," yet we do not learn whether or not he had been baptized, or whether or not he had (then) become filled with the Holy Spirit. Nor do we learn, regarding him, whether he became filled with the Spirit *subsequent* to his healing. Given the important role that Spirit-filling plays in Paul's letters, one would have expected Paul to attempt to help the man become Spirit-filled, not just healed. But the passage is silent on this matter, only implying that Paul's ability to heal was attributable to the fact that he was himself Spirit-filled. What one must keep in mind here, of course, that the writing here is by Luke, not Paul.

18. Acts 19:2 - 6: While in Ephesus Paul encountered some disciples, and asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit upon becoming believers—seemingly suggesting that when one comes to "believe in" Jesus (i.e., believe he is Messiah), one will *automatically* receive the Holy Spirit (contrary to Paul's views, as expressed in his letters). They responded that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul asked them what kind of baptism they had received, and they responded the baptism of John (the Baptizer). Paul told them that John's baptism was for those who had turned away from their sins (the water baptism symbolizing this resolve on their part). In learning this they were baptized (by Paul?) in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Baptizer's baptisms had not, of course, been done in the name of Jesus, whereas those done by Paul were. This difference was enough to result in Spirit-filling in Paul's case but not the Baptizer's (with the exception of his baptism of Jesus, of course!). The implication here is that water baptism in Jesus's name will *automatically* result in Spirit-indwelling on the part of the one baptized. Given this, what role did Paul's laying on of hands play in the Spirit-possession that occurred? Luke gives us no explanation. Evidently Luke had heard a story involving Paul's encounter with some disciples, and was relaying what he had learned. Ignoring the fact that the contents of that story lacked agreement with what Paul wrote in his letters (which had been written several years before Acts)—to say nothing of Luke's own views.

The passage states that when Paul placed his hands on these people, they were immediately filled with the Holy Spirit (bypassing the water baptism that Luke seemingly thought of as preceding such possession). In becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, what did they do? They began to speak in strange tongues and proclaim "God's message." If that's *all* they did, Paul would have been disappointed, because his letters make clear that he did not place much value in glossalalia—which makes us suspicious of the authenticity of this story. And in proclaiming "God's message," what, precisely, did they say? Luke does not tell us, so that it is anyone's guess.

19. Acts 26:20: Paul, in speaking before King Agrippa, says that he has preached to people that they must repent of their sins and turn to God, and then do the things that would

show they had repented. What's odd here is the lack of any reference to the Holy Spirit (because he doesn't want Agrippa to know about the Holy Spirit?). In his letters, Paul had linked proper behavior to Spirit-filling, but here resolving to turn to God is sufficient. Note that "turning to God" would seem to refer to living by God's Law; but keep in mind that Paul, in his letters, in referring to proper behavior does not exhibit any substantial knowledge of what the Law is about! If anything, he seems to have more of a Gentile understanding of good behavior, perhaps influenced by Greek philosophy. Beyond this point, however, is the fact that this story is simply not believable, given what we know about Paul's views from his letters. Perhaps what this story reflects is Luke's lack of accurate information regarding Paul's theological views (as opposed to deliberate misrepresentation).

20. Acts 28:8: While on the island of Malta, the father of Publius (the chief of the island) was in bed, sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went into his room, prayed, laid his hands on him, and healed him. Note here that it says that it was *Paul* who healed the man, not God—or not the man's faith in conjunction with the special power Paul had by virtue of being Spirit-filled. Note that in the references to Peter's healings, Peter never claimed healing power for himself. Also, note here that there is no reference to the healed man becoming "converted." The fact that Paul's lack of missionizing in this case is in conflict with what we know about Paul from his letters renders this story unbelievable as well.

In concluding the presentation here, let me begin by noting that if one were to generalize from the 20 sets of instruction discussed above, one might conclude that Luke's "conversion theory" was as follows:

- The beginning point in the "journey" is to "recognize"—to believe—that Jesus was/is Messiah.
- Next, one must repent of one's sins (must, that is, recognize *that* one has sinned, and express sorrow, regret regarding that fact).
- This step must be followed by a decision, on one's part, to change the way one lives one's life (so that one minimizes one's sinning, ideally to the point of zero sinning).
- If one does this, one can be certain that God will forgive one of one's sinning; He will "wipe His slate clean" (God here being viewed as a bookkeeper of sorts, who keeps a record of all sinning).
- Because one can be assured that God will forgive one of one's sins, one can expect to experience a feeling that a burden has fallen from one's back; one can expect to feel that one is now liberated from the burden of sin that one had been carrying (the "burden" here being one's *conscience* "telling" one that one was a sinner).

- If one has that sort of experience, one way of perceiving it is that it's as if God has washed away one's sins—has washed away the markings on his slate with a wet cloth. Therefore, to recognize this feeling to oneself, and before announcing it to others, one should undergo water baptism to symbolize this washing away of one's sins.
- Another reason for undergoing water baptism is that, just as Jesus's Spirit-filling occurred in conjunction with His baptism by John the Baptizer, so may *we* also. This is not inevitable, but is a strong possibility; so that given the positive implications associated with Spirit-filling, it is by all means advisable to become baptized. But if you become baptized under false pretenses (i.e., merely pretending that you have gone through the necessary preceding steps), watch out! Don't forget what happened to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1 - 11)!
- Why would one want to become Spirit-filled? This will make one feel energized, so that not only will one be better able to cope in one's everyday life, but will be able to do things that one otherwise would not be able to do. Not least of importance is that if one is Spirit-filled, one will be able to live a life in accord with God's wishes.

Given the discussion of “instructions” earlier in this essay, the reader may very well state at this point: “You are claiming that there is a basic ‘path to salvation’ presented in Acts whereas your analysis of the 20 passages above makes clear that Luke, in Acts, is ‘all over the map’ so far as ‘paths’ are concerned.” And that is, I will not deny, a true statement. In fact, I would add that if one takes the above points (what I have referred to as Luke's “theory”) and treats them as the “model” of what “salvation” involves, none of the passages “measures up” very well! Indeed, the following generalizations can be made regarding those passages:

- Of the total of 20 paths, there are 15 (or 16) different ones! Paths 1, 11, 12, 13, and 20 are alike; and 10 and 16 could be regarded as alike. But other than those particular sets of instructions, each of the others is unique!
- None of the sets of instructions is complete (when compared with the “model” set). That is, each set is missing steps—and it is not necessarily appropriate for us to assume that the missing steps are *implied*, for we can't read Luke's mind.
- With the “instructions” associated with No. 15, the steps are out of order with reference to the “model” steps. And the same can be said for No. 3.
- With Nos. 9 and 18 there is a laying on of hands, a sort of action that is not in the model. Likewise, in No. 7 prayer is involved, which also is not part of the model.

Therefore, my fundamental conclusion regarding Acts is that although there is a basis for contending that a certain *single* set of “instructions” underlies Luke's discussion, when the 20 sets of instructions are studied with a microscope, their lack of agreement is what stands out. The question *that* fact raises is: Does this variety exist because Luke was simply careless or, rather, was a *deliberately* “careless” because he wanted to attract a variety of people to his

particular Jesus Movement? I have no idea what the correct answer to this question is—my only comment here being that Acts was written for the benefit of people living in a different part of the world at a much earlier point in time, so that there is no reason for those of us who regard ourselves as being a part of the Tradition (see my “Worship,” referred to earlier) of which Jesus and Luke were a part to pay much heed to Acts.

The Bible and Human Nature

James B. Gray

Recently I was dragged (I'm married!) into a shopping center, and while waiting for others in the group to do their shopping, I wandered into a book store. I headed for the "remainders" section in the front of the store (the "B" in my name stands for "buy cheap"!), and happened upon Frans de Waal's *Our Inner Ape* (2005, the subtitle of which is *A Leading Primatologist Explains Why We Are Who We Are*). Having read de Waal's *Good Natured* several years ago, and been favorably impressed, I couldn't pass over the book—after all, it was only \$3.99.

Let me provide a little background to this purchase: Over the years various approaches have been used to discover the "true" nature of human nature:

- Observing human behavior in modern (Western) societies, and making generalizations about that behavior.
- Observing contemporary "primitives"—i.e., people who live in tribal societies, and who engage in, e.g., gathering-hunting activities.
- Archeological research focused on early humans.
- Studies of similar species (plural) (the de Waal approach).

The first of these approaches is the most simple-minded, for it tacitly assumes that human behavior has only a biological basis. For many decades it has been widely held, contrary to this simple-minded view, that human behavior is a function not only of "nature," but also "nurture" (or "culture") as well; so that an argument that assumes away the relevance of nurture/culture is wholly unacceptable to those who argue that both nurture/culture *and* nature affect behavior.

The second and third approaches have in common that they assume that human nature reached its fullest development prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago—at which time the way of life that humans had (i.e., one focused on gathering-hunting) was concordant with their biological "design" (as it had come into being as a result of various selection mechanisms). With the Agricultural Revolution, however, ways of life began to change, whereas human biology did not—so that increasingly there developed a discrepancy between the way of life people lived and the way of life they had become designed for. This discrepancy itself then became a causal factor having both direct and indirect effects on human behavior, so that a variety of factors became operative in addition to human nature in causing human behavior.

Those who adopted this perspective not only rejected the viewpoint that human nature can be inferred from the contemporary of "civilized" peoples, but the viewpoint of those who adhered to the nature-nurture argument. They, rather, reached the conclusion that one could only know human nature by studying people who had lived prior to the Agricultural Revolution—and this conclusion led to two strategies. One was to engage in archeological research, and make

inferences from artifacts of early humans thereby discovered (bones, implements, etc.). The other strategy was to argue that *contemporary* “primitives” are “living fossils,” in a sense: people who have behavior patterns very similar to their ancestors of millennia ago; so that by studying these peoples with a focus on their behavior patterns, one could infer not only *their* human nature, but the human nature of their ancient ancestors. That is, it was assumed that their behavior was “pure” in the sense of reflecting only their biological tendencies—with their institutions themselves also reflecting their biological tendencies—so that their behavior was a function of their biological natures, and *only* those natures.

This latter “theory” has been the basis for a great deal of anthropological research over the past few decades (but especially during the twentieth century)—summarized, e.g., by Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley in *The Challenge of the Primitives* (1975). Related to such anthropological research—but using an entirely different approach (one that looked to cybernetics and decision science) was George Edgin Pugh’s brilliant *The Biological Origin of Human Values* (1977).

The final approach to the discovery of “the nature of human nature” has been the study of species similar to humans. Formerly “similar” was thought of in terms of anatomy and physiology, but currently DNA is the basis for determining similarity. Frans de Waal is one of the contemporary researchers who has been interested in studying species that are similar to humans (his focus has been on chimpanzees and bonobos); and as the title of his 2005 book indicates, his interest in studying apes has been to gain knowledge that will have carryover value for ascertaining the nature of human nature.

As I was in the process of reading de Waal’s book, my dissatisfaction with the book grew, for I kept discovering intellectual problems with his “message”:

- Virtually all of the “explanations” that he offers are of a *functionalist* sort, rather than of a *causal/deductive* nature. Thus, none of these functionalist “explanations” are true explanations.
- This problem is compounded by the problem that when de Waal does offer causal/deductive explanations, they are invariably glib: he uses “Nature” and “evolution” as explanatory factors; and when he uses “natural selection” as an explanation, he seemingly never gives it the causal/deductive meaning that Charles Darwin gave the term but, rather, the vacuous modern “producing progeny” meaning for which Ronald Fisher can be “credited.”
- De Waal nowhere gives evidence that he is aware of the above-mentioned “discrepancy” idea and its implications for explaining human behavior.
- He is insufficiently careful in making parallels between ape behavior and human behavior: just because behavioral parallels exist between humans and apes, it does not follow that the explanations of the similarities are identical (namely, that both have a purely biological basis).

However, I learned long ago to adopt the viewpoint that I should read a book not so much to learn what the author has to say, as to hope that during the process of reading *my own* thinking would be stimulated. And this is exactly what happened while I was reading *Our Inner Ape*. Thus, I quickly lost interest in writing a critique of the book in favor of developing the ideas that were “coming” to me as I was reading the book. The result is the present essay—in which I focus on what the Bible has to “say” about human nature. And what I do specifically is offer an approach to discovering “the nature of human nature” to add to the list presented above.

It will be useful to begin a presentation of my Bible-based approach to the human nature question by pointing out that so far as I know, in the Bible (my 1976 *Good News Bible*, at any rate) “human nature” appears only in Galatians 5:17-21:

For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do. If the Spirit leads you, then you are not subject to the Law. What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these.

From what Paul stated regarding human nature, then, it would appear that if he were here today, he would declare that most Americans are obviously captives of human nature rather than “possessed” by the Holy Spirit (and therefore certainly not Christians!).

If I were a Biblical literalist, I would state that I know that human nature is “nasty” (to allude to Thomas Hobbes), because the Bible tells me so, case closed. But by no means am I a Biblical literalist (being, rather, one who has been influenced by, e.g., Thorstein Veblen’s “[Christian Morals](#) and the Competitive System,” 1910)—so that, as a consequence, I am able to see beyond Paul’s view of the matter. In my “[Worship](#)” I put my particular “spin” on the prophetic movement given attention in the “Old Testament,” and I would now add a slightly different perspective on that discussion.—one that focuses on the question: *Why* did that movement arise?

The answer that I would give that question now is that those individuals whom we have come to identify as “prophets”—best thought of, though, as *preachers*—were very sensitive individuals who via some mechanism that I will not try to explain were able to “remember” a pre-Agricultural Revolution (or at least a past pastoral nomadic time) way of life. A way of life that either *was* one in accord with human nature or one (i.e., a pastoral nomadic one) *close* to one in accord with human nature. Therefore, the “ideals” that they expressed only *seemed* to be ideals at the time they were expressed (and to us now); for in actuality they represented an articulation—a making explicit—of “principles” that had been operative in an earlier time. Not operative as consciously-recognized principles, of course, but, rather, as “dictates” of human nature.

This is not to say, though, that the notions regarding how people should be living—ideas that the prophets were so convinced about that expressing them had more importance in their lives than life itself—should be thought of as representing “pure” expressions of past human nature. As the

prophetic movement developed—and insofar as one prophet was aware of the activities/pronouncements, etc., of his predecessors—it is to be expected that embellishment occurred. That is, it is to be expected that the farther we get into the prophetic movement (i.e., the closer we get to the present), the more embellished, “polished,” would be the normative statements of the prophets: the less would they express a “remembrance” of human nature as it had existed in its “pure” form, and the more would they involve “idealization.”

Still, the fact that these individuals placed more value on the “revelations” that had occurred to them than the quality of their own lives means that a powerful motivation was at work in their lives. And the only explanation that occurs to me for this fact is that a “remembrance” of a past life in which people were living in accord with their biological natures somehow entered the minds of these men. Perhaps some reader will sense that my explanation here resonates with them, and they will then be able to “flesh out” my argument here. (Also, I invite any reader with a research orientation to test the “idealization” hypothesis that I offer in the previous paragraph.)

I would continue my explanation by asserting that not only did the prophets draw upon a “remembrance” of an earlier way-of-life situation, but would call attention to the fact that Thomas Jefferson, in his later life, for some reason felt compelled to produce an excised version of the Bible. So that his Bible contains passages that expressed values that obviously resonated with him, and excluded those which did not. Why did certain passages have this effect on him? My answer is that Jefferson—an extremely intelligent man—was able to sense that certain passages expressed true human nature, others did not—and therefore did not warrant inclusion in a holy book. So that he therefore felt an obligation to remove this dross from the Bible, so that it could not tarnish the gold therein.

Related to this point regarding Jefferson, there is the question: Why does one, as a contemporary reader, find certain passages in the Bible moving? Why do some passages invoke in one an emotional reaction—perhaps even bringing tears to one’s eyes? My answer: They somehow cause one to “recognize” that they are causing one to “remember” a past way of life within which those “ideals” were actually *lived*.

The attitude of most of those constituting the Christian Establishment seems to be that the “ideals” expressed in the Bible are merely ideals. Wasn’t it Augustine, in fact, who contended that humans were born with a sinful nature? Did not, in fact, even those who put the “Old Testament” together feel a need to include a story (of Adam and Eve) that “explained” the origin of sinfulness?

My view is that a *rationalization* was provided, not an *explanation*, and that the unfortunate impact of this is that it has given the Christian Establishment ever since a basis for *justifying* evil behavior. In that they have then passed on (if only inadvertently) this mentality to their congregants, they have been agents of evil. Another good reason for *not* wishing the label “Christian” to be applied to oneself!

Thorstein Veblen: A Modern Prophet

James B. Gray

The ostensible purposes of education are to inform, enlighten, encourage critical and creative thinking, liberate the mind (through “liberal” education), etc. Does, however, education *function* in such a manner as to accomplish those purposes in individuals exposed to the educational system? It would be expected, of course, that these purposes would be accomplished to *different degrees* with different individuals. But are we justified in claiming that, *generally speaking*, these purposes are realized in *most* of those exposed to our educational institutions (whether public or private)?

I would answer this latter question with a definite “No!” That the educational system (in *our* society, at least), rather, *ill*-informs and *mis*informs those who are subjected to its efforts—and, rather, functions to help “fit” one to the role that one is to play in the society. Especially does the educational system not inform those exposed to it to the matter of how the society “works.” This is not to say that the educational system does not “educate” students on this matter—for it does. But that “education” consists largely of misinformation and the omission of relevant information.

The educational system may accurately inform those in its charge regarding the “natural” world. But this is more true of the physical world than the realm of lifeforms. And even the offerings of the educational system concerning the physical world are biased in the sense of reflecting our modern way of life. As proof of this latter claim, consider the fact that gatherer-hunter peoples are not lacking in modern physics because they are intellectually “backward” but, rather, because they have no *need* for modern physics.

As to how the society “works,” not only does one not learn truths about this during the course of one’s educational career. The *nature* of that “education” induces in “inmates” of the educational system an *incapacity* to discover such truths on one’s own. In most cases, one matriculates in such an intellectual condition that one is effectively dead from the neck up—so that one thereafter spends one’s life in an “unresurrected” state. Occasionally, however, some individuals—such as Thorstein Veblen—are able to escape the clutches of the educational system, and see without being hindered by the blinders that handicap²⁶⁸ most people. Such people, however, do not “fit” the society well, and therefore not only have difficulty gaining recognition, but even *surviving* with any degree of comfort. If Veblen was able to gain some measure of recognition (in his time, at any rate), this was only because his writing style was often rather convoluted (thereby presenting a challenge to those who thrive on challenges), he occasionally adopted a stance of tongue-in-cheek mock seriousness, and his writings often (therefore) contained sophisticated humor (attractive to those with high intelligence). In addition, Veblen was writing at a time when the societal system was not as developed as in our

²⁶⁸ “Handicap” is not necessarily the most apt term to use here—given that one has the *best* chance of becoming “successful” in the society if one *is* “handicapped” in this sense—but unaware of the “deficiency.”

time—so that in being less machine-like in its operation, it “allowed” exceptional individuals such as Veblen some breathing room.

How, then, *does* the society “work”? Using not only Veblen’s writings but my own experiences over the years as resources, I would state the following, beginning with the assertion that a society should be perceived as a *system*. This implies that a society not only consists of discrete components (or sectors), but that those parts are interrelated. Usually, however, those constituent parts are not interrelated in an egalitarian manner but, rather, in a manner of control-dependence. That is, typically one of the sectors plays a *control* role and the other sectors a *dependent* one relative to the dominant sector. I should add that the sector playing a control role likely achieved that position in a manner that might be difficult to explain: certainly it did not achieve the role as a result of conscious decision-making on the part of some of the individuals in the sector.

The *character* of the dominant sector is not a fixed matter through time. Indeed, change in the character of the dominant sector seems to be one of the “constants” of a societal system. So that beginning with the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago there arose, as the dominant sector, one consisting of royalty. Later (in the West), a landowning class came to be dominant. In the early centuries of the Common Era the Church (i.e., its leaders) became the dominant sector. As the Age of Discovery got underway a commercial group rose to prominence; with the Industrial Revolution that began about 1750 CE a manufacturing group started to emerge as a dominant element; and more recently have financial (and “service”—e.g., Halliburton) interests assumed that position. Meaning that for several hundred years now the dominant sector has been an economic one.²⁶⁹

The fact that at any given time (except for a transitional period) one sector is dominant means that the other sectors all play a subservient role; that is, they are not simply “just there” but serve the interests of the dominant sector. In fact, one can argue that the mere existence of a sector other than the dominant one is evidence that that sector is playing a subservient role; for if it were not, it would cease existing. Thus, although a given societal system tends to operate fairly smoothly, it does not follow from that fact that interactions between the various sectors are perfectly harmonious. Insofar as those in a given non-dominant sector are unaware of the status of their sector in “the larger scheme of things,” they will readily acquiesce to their subordinate position. But if some individuals in a given such sector begin to gain some consciousness of their “serving” function, they may introduce some friction into the system—such that those in the dominant sector feel a need to remove the sources of the friction, and then do. A societal system “operates” in such a manner, then, that in the context of a modern society such as ours, the most common profession is intellectual prostitute. Were inmates of the society to become aware of this fact, however, the society would soon collapse into utter chaos.

²⁶⁹ Veblen, in his “[Christian Morals](#) and the Competitive System,” 1910, stated regarding “pecuniary competition” that it “today rules the economic life of Christendom and in large measure guides western civilisation in much else than the economic respect.”

The fact that a given non-dominant sector plays a (mere) subservient role in the societal system—with individuals in that sector typically being unaware of this fact—has important implications. For example, with the *education* sector parents can be expected to apply pressure on school officials to provide coursework that will enable their children to get good jobs in the job market; and leaders in the economy sector can be expected to sponsor the development of “educational” materials that “prove” that a “free enterprise” (or “market”) economic system is, “obviously,” the best sort of economic system—because it yields a high average “standard of living,” gives one the freedom to develop their own business, etc. Concessions will be granted to those who want their children to learn about, and participate in, music and art; to study literature; etc. And concessions will definitely be granted to those who want sports programs to be a part of the curriculum—for, after all, such activities help train those who participate for positions in the economy (leadership ones in particular). But courses/programs that lack an orientation to the economy will always be forced to take a back seat to those that do have such an orientation.

The *research* sector of the society—associated especially with colleges/universities—will tend to undertake research for which financial support is provided. Given that such support will tend to come from corporations (and certain wealthy individuals), and that the sponsors will require that certain kinds of research be done, the research that *is* done will tend to be *supportive* of the economy sector—or, at least, neutral. If corporations sponsor research that has no direct relevance for the functioning of the economy, it is likely to be research that has little relevance so far as the interests of the economy are concerned. Research that is critical of specific firms/industries, or of the economic system as a type of system (i.e., “capitalist”) would never be supported by corporations—but might be supported by certain individuals who had become wealthy. More likely, however, those inclined to engage in such research would not find organizations/individuals willing to provide financial support for their work; and if they engage in it anyway, they are likely to have difficulty getting their results published. (I should add that Veblen expressed his critical views on the university in his 1918 *The [Higher Learning in America](#)*.)

An excellent example of how academia is in effect controlled by elite members of the economy sector is the popularity within academia for explanations of social phenomena that ignore *societal context* as an explanatory factor in favor of explanations that look to individual choice or biology. Most notorious regarding the latter factor is the use of the “natural selection” argument. The term itself was introduced by Charles Darwin in his 1859 *The Origin of Species*; and the theory, as stated by Darwin therein, can be summarized with the following statements:

- Excess births is a law of nature (for which, though, Darwin offered no explanation).
- This leads inexorably to intraspecific competition.
- Those individuals of the given species with an (inherited) trait(s) enabling them to win in this competition survive (and at least some later produce progeny).²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Note, therefore, that “fitness” in Darwinian thinking refers to fitting a sociological situation, *not* fitting the environment.

- Over time, that trait(s) (along with any other traits that may be correlated with it) will become more pronounced in the group in question. (That is, the mean value will increase—or decrease, in certain cases—or the percent value will increase—or decrease; whether the relevant number is a mean or percent depends on the measurement scale used with the trait(s) in question.)
- Quantitative change will thereby occur in the given species over time, this change occurring in a slow, steady, and “progressive” manner—the name given to this process being (monotypic) *evolution* (although “development” would be more apt than “evolution”—but I certainly do not want to accuse evolutionary writers of intellectual sloppiness here!).

In the fifth edition of *Origin* Darwin used the phrase “survival of the fittest”—having borrowed the phrase (with credit) from Herbert Spencer; and this phrase has become well-known, even by the illiterate. The argument has been put forth by academics (and others) that the “survival of the fittest” principle rules in the human realm, but they provide no evidence that the *premises* of the theory of natural selection have any realism for our species.²⁷¹ They don’t provide any evidence, of course, because such evidence does not exist! Yet scholars continue to present arguments regarding alleged innate selfishness and aggressiveness that are built on foundations of sand—if that. And the unbelievable part of this is that their demonstrably spurious reasoning and “evidence” gets published!

Much that gets published by academics is trivial rubbish that has no relevance for the continuation of the Existing Order. Some of it, however, is clearly supportive of it. It is not surprising, then, that such “research” receives financial support and gets published—in spite of its intellectual shabbiness. The pity is that so many academics spend their time wallowing in triviality and intellectual shabbiness that they don’t even recognize such traits in the work of their fellow academics; so that “peer review” is by no means a guarantee for intellectual excellence. Virtually all academics are a part of the Existing Order—including those who provide little or no support to it—and, as a consequence, few offer any sort of intellectual threat to that Order. The moral: Read what academics write, but be cautious, read with a “knowing” eye.

Whereas colleges/universities produce “knowledge” especially of a general (“nomothetic”) nature, the *media* produce basically “particularistic” (“idiographic”) knowledge gathered by “reporters,” and disseminate it through newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. Given that the media are supported primarily through advertisements rather than subscriptions, they must be sensitive to the wishes of those who pay their bills, and thus tend to be rather restrained in their criticisms of the society. Insofar as they *do* offer criticisms, they tend to be directed at individuals who have made “bad choices,” etc., rather than at the system itself. Thus, one does not expect to find any calls for societal system change emanating from the media. The recent arrival of the internet on the scene has, of course, changed the media picture somewhat, as

²⁷¹ Just *one* of the deficiencies in their reasoning.

“alternate” viewpoints are now rather common on the internet. Insofar as one encounters “radical” ideas on the internet, however, they tend to be ones emanating from the “far right.” Still, the internet has changed the media picture substantially, and one wonders how long the “free and easy” situation that one currently finds with the internet will be allowed to continue by the elite and its lackeys.

Religion, finally, is also a part of the societal system, and like the sectors previously discussed also plays a subservient role in the society—serving (currently) the needs of the economy sector. Thus, on the one hand, because our society is a class society, and therefore contains people with varying needs, different denominations have arisen within Protestantism to serve the needs of these different classes of people. Catholic churches have been able to retain more diversity within their congregations; but insofar as homilies delivered in Catholic churches deal with social issues to the same degree that sermons in Protestant churches do, they also tend to lack in specificity—so that they also tend to “go in one ear and out the other.” But homilies at least have the virtue of not expressing the “far right” views that one finds in certain Protestant churches.

Religion not only serves the economy sector by accommodating itself to the fact that ours is a class society. It also exhibits its subservience to that sector by refraining from making any serious critiques of the Existing Order. The “goodness” that it teaches is of an individualistic nature, focusing on refraining from sinning and doing “good” deeds. What it basically teaches (if but implicitly) is that one should adapt oneself to the Existing Order as best one can, avoid criminal activities and harmful vices, and be a Good Samaritan when the occasion arises. The economy sector has, therefore, nothing to fear from the religion sector; if anything, indeed, it is *helped* by the religion sector in that the religion sector helps provide it with a willing, and even enthusiastic, work force that is not inclined to be disruptive of the System.

This, then, is my perception—influenced somewhat by Thorstein Veblen’s writings—of the nature of our society, including how it “works.” *Why* it “works” this way is something that I can offer no explanation for. And I don’t expect to find an answer published anywhere—including on an internet site—for the simple reason that we are all part of the Existing Order and therefore influenced in our thinking by that fact—an exposure that tends to incapacitate us from thinking deeply about its nature. And even if we, like Veblen, are able to escape, somewhat, the intellectual clutches of the Existing Order, if we try to publicize our ideas, we can expect to be met either with silence or hostility—for the simple reason that most members of the society have become “programmed” to think in such a way that they simply can’t perceive deviant views as comprehensible, sensible, or even sane.

Despite this fact, what I wish to do next is use the above discussion to serve as an introduction to what I regard as Veblen’s most important intellectual contribution—a contribution that I regard as highly relevant for today. A contribution, indeed, that qualifies Veblen for the label “modern prophet.” That contribution can be thought of as a “theory,” the statements comprising that theory being as follows. Some of the statements are implicit in Veblen, others explicit; where they are the latter, I provide quotations from the two works by Veblen that best convey the theory, in my judgment—“Christian Morals and the Competitive System” (1910; internet link

provided above) and *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914).²⁷² The first will be referred to below as “CM,” the latter as “IW.” If a quotation does not appear under a given point, what this signifies is either that I have placed a relevant quotation(s) under some other point(s), or the point itself represents a “missing link” in Veblen’s reasoning that I am supplying for the sake of completeness.

1. Contemporary “savages” (the term used a century ago to refer to gatherer-hunter peoples) have been found to engage primarily in positive behaviors (e.g., working cooperatively with others in the group) and neutral activities (e.g., conversing and/or joking with others in the group).

“While this [“the principle of brotherly love, or the impulse to mutual service”] seems to be a characteristic trait of Christian morals and may serve as a specific mark by which to distinguish this morality from the greater non-Christian cults, it is apparently a trait which Christendom shares with many of the obscurer cultures, and which does not in any higher degree characterise Christendom than it does these other, lower cultures. In the lower, non-Christian cultures, particularly among the more peaceable communities of savages, something of the kind appears to prevail by mere force of hereditary propensity; at least it appears, in some degree, to belong to these lower civilisations without being traceable to special teaching or to a visible interposition of divine grace. And in an obscure and dubious fashion, perhaps sporadically, it recurs throughout the life of human society with such an air of ubiquity as would argue that it is an elemental trait of the species, rather than a cultural product of Christendom. It may not be an overstatement to say that this principle is, in its elements, in some sort an atavistic trait, and that Christendom comes by it through a cultural reversion to the animus of the lower (peaceable) savage culture.” [CM]

“the lower cultures, where the hereditary traits of the species should presumably assert themselves” [CM]

“The Christian principles inculcate brotherly love, mutual succor: Love thy neighbor as thyself; *Mutuum date, nihil inde sperantes*. This principle seems, in its elements at least, to be a culturally atavistic trait, belonging to the ancient, not to say primordial, peaceable culture of lower savagery.” [CM]

“the golden rule of the peaceable savage has never lost the respect of occidental mankind, and its hold on men’s convictions is, perhaps, stronger now than at any earlier period of the modern time.” [CM]

“Its [renunciation’s] companion principle, brotherly love or mutual service, appears, in its elements at least, to be a very deep rooted and ancient cultural trait, due to an extremely protracted experience of the race in the early stages of human culture, reinforced and defined by the social conditions prevalent in the early days of Christianity.” [CM]

“the impulsive bias of brotherly love” [CM]

²⁷² “After he had ceased writing [,] Veblen declared that *The Instinct of Workmanship* was his only important book.” Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*. New York: The Viking Press, 1934, p. 324. I would say that *Instinct* was Veblen’s *most* important book, but not his *only* important book.

2. **We can infer from this fact that prior to the Agricultural Revolution—when only “savage” humans existed—similar behavior prevailed with the humans of the time.**
3. **Given that with the “savages” of the pre-Agricultural Revolution period we can assume that there had been co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life (with associated behavior patterns), we can conclude that the behaviors these individuals engaged in expressed the human nature that had developed.**
4. **With the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life (with associated institutions) began to develop, and with them new behavior patterns.**
5. **However, human biology remained relatively unchanged over time. Because it was not changing, humans were now engaging in some behaviors contrary to their human nature.**

“A surviving mutant type is necessarily suited more or less closely to the circumstances under which it emerged and first made good its survival, and it is presumably less suited to any other situation.” [IW]

“Changes in the institutional structure are continually taking place in response to the altered discipline of life under changing cultural conditions, but human nature remains specifically the same.” [IW]

“But there is no warrant for assuming that each or any of these successive changes in the scheme of institutions affords successively readier, surer or more facile ways and means for the instinctive proclivities to work out their ends, or that this sequence of change is more suitable to the untroubled functioning of these instincts than any phase that has gone before. Indeed, the presumption is the other way.” [IW]

“the fitness of any given type of human nature for life after the manner and under the conditions imposed by any later phase in the growth of culture is a matter of less and less secure presumption the farther the sequence of institutional change has departed from that form of savagery which marked the initial stage in the life-history of the given racial stock.” [IW]

“history records more frequent and more spectacular instances of the triumph of imbecile institutions over life and culture than of peoples who have by force of instinctive insight saved themselves alive out of a desperately precarious institutional situation” [IW]

“changes come rarely—in effect, not at all—in the endowment of instincts whereby mankind is enabled to employ these means [e.g., “technological ways and means”] and to live under the institutions which its habits of life have cumulatively created.” [IW]

6. **We moderns still have the same basic human nature as our “savage” ancestors did, but our ways of life (with associated institutions) result in behavior patterns are far more deviant than were those of, e.g., the early agriculturalists.**
7. **Because our modern way of life (with its particular institutions) requires us to engage in behaviors that are contrary to ones that would be in accord with human nature, the resulting “discrepancy” has various negative consequences for us: it precipitates**

pathological behaviors (involving harm to others and/or oneself), physical illnesses (including ones of a psychosomatic nature), mental problems, etc.

“But such an animus as best comports with the logic of the machine process does not, it appears, for good or ill, best comport with the native strain of human nature in those peoples subject to its discipline. In all the various peoples of Christendom there is a visible straining against the drift of the machine’s teaching, rising at time and in given classes of the population to the pitch of revulsion.

“It is apparently among the moderately well-to-do, the half-idle classes, that such a revulsion chiefly has its way; leading now and again to fantastic, archaising cults and beliefs and to make-believe credence in occult insights and powers. At the same time, and with the like tincture of affectation and make-believe, there runs through much of the community a feeling of maladjustment and discomfort, that seeks a remedy in a ‘return to Nature’ in one way or another; some sort of return to ‘the simple life,’ which shall in some fashion afford an escape from the unending ‘grind’ of living from day to day by the machine method and shall so put behind us for a season the burdensome futilities by help of which alone life can be carried on under the routine of the machine process.” [IW]

“This growing recourse to vacations should be passably conclusive evidence to the effect that neither the manner of life enforced by the machine system, nor the occupations of those who are in close contact with this technology and its due habits of thought, can be ‘natural’ to the common run of civilised mankind.” [IW]

“According to accepted theories of heredity, civilised mankind should by native endowment be best fit to live under conditions of a moderately advanced savagery, such as the machine technology will not permit. Neither in the physical conditions which it imposes, therefore, nor in the habitual ways of observation and reasoning which it requires in the work to be done, is the machine age adapted to the current native endowment of the race. And these various movements of unrest and revulsion are evidence, for as much as they are worth, that such is the case..

Not least convincing is the fact that a considerable proportion of those who are held unremittingly to the service of the machine process ‘break down,’ fall into premature decay. Physically and spiritually these modern peoples are better adapted to life under conditions radically different from those imposed by this modern technology.” [IW]

“The limit of tolerance native to the race, physically and spiritually, is short of that unmitigated materialism and unremitting mechanical routine to which the machine technology incontinently drives.” [IW]

“Laymen seek respite in the fog of occult and esoteric faiths and cults, and so fall back on the will to believe things of which the senses transmit no evidence; while the learned and studious are, by stress of the same ‘aching void,’ drawn into speculative tenets of ostensible knowledge that purport to go nearer to the heart of reality, and that elude all mechanistic proof or disproof.” [IW]

“Neither the manner of life imposed by the machine process, nor the manner of thought inculcated by habituation to its logic will fall in with the free movement of the human spirit, born, as it is, to fit the conditions of savage life. So there comes an irrepressible—in a sense, congenital—recrudescence of magic, occult science, telepathy, spiritualism, vitalism, pragmatism.” [IW]

8. Still, because humans still have the same basic biology that they had when “savagery” prevailed, from time to time (and especially within certain classes of people) behavior in accord with human nature occurs on a rather widespread scale.²⁷³

[At the time of the origin of Christianity:] “The pride of caste and all the principles of differential dignity and honor fell away, and left mankind naked and unashamed and free to follow the promptings of hereditary savage human nature [,] which make for fellowship and Christian charity. Barring repressive conventionalities, reversion to the spiritual state of savagery is always easy; for human nature is still substantially savage. The discipline of savage life, selective and adaptive, has been by far the most protracted and probably the most exacting of any phase of culture in all the life-history of the race; so that by heredity human nature still is, and must indefinitely continue to be, savage human nature. This savage spiritual heritage that ‘springs eternal’ when the pressure of conventionality is removed or relieved, seems highly conducive to the two main traits of Christian morality, though more so to the principle of brotherly love than to that of renunciation [or “humility,” “abnegation”].” [CM]

[Although the brotherly love principle that operated with the early Christians has lost much of its force, “being currently represented by a thrifty charity, and, perhaps, by the negative principle of fair play, neither of which can fairly be rated as a competent expression of the Christian spirit.”] “Yet this principle is forever reasserting itself in economic matters, in the impulsive approval of whatever conduct is serviceable to the common good and in the disapproval of disserviceable conduct even within the limits of legality and natural right.” [CM]

[The historical development of a period during which “handicraft and petty trade” were the dominant features of the economy involved, one might argue] “a qualified or mitigated (sophisticated) return to the spirit of savagery, or at least as a spiritual reversion looking in that direction, though by no means abruptly reaching the savage plane.” [IW]

“That the eighteenth-century system of Natural Rights allows . . . a degree of approximation to the scheme of rights and obligations observed among many primitive peoples need flutter no one’s sense of cultural consistency. Return to Nature was more or less of a password in the closing period of the era of handicraft and after, and in respect of this system of civil relations it appears that the popular attitude of that time was in effect something of a reversion to primitive habits of thought; though it was at best a partial return to a ‘state of nature,’ in the sense of a state of peace and industry rather than a return to the unsophisticated beginnings of society.” [IW]

“It is not that the era of handicraft was an era of reversion to savagery, but only that the tone-giving factor in the community of that time reverted, by force of the state of the industrial arts, to habits of peace and industry, in which direct and detailed manual work takes a leading place.” [IW]

9. There is therefore hope that such behavior can come to the fore again, on a widespread scale, if the circumstances are right.

273 Twice in “Christian Morals . . .” Veblen used the term “mutual aid,” suggesting that he was familiar with Prince Peter Kropotkin’s book with that title (published in 1902, but based on a series of articles published several years earlier in *The Nineteenth Century*, an important periodical of the time). (Kropotkin had written the articles to respond to an earlier article in the same periodical by Thomas H. Huxley.) Veblen may also have been familiar with other of Kropotkin’s works, such as *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1924)—for, after all, Veblen was a well-read man. Insofar as Veblen was familiar with Kropotkin’s works, he would have learned of “mutual aid” behavior in both the animal and human realms—some of it resulting from Kropotkin’s own research in Siberia.

“Except for a possible reversion to a cultural situation strongly characterised by ideals of emulation and status, the ancient racial bias embodied in the Christian principle of brotherhood should logically continue to gain ground at the expense of the pecuniary morals of competitive business.” [CM]

10. What are those “circumstances”? The right institutional situation (among other factors).

Veblen was silent on this matter, but the fact that he perceived the “savage” way of life as “natural” and regarded that way of life as normative means that he would have been supportive of institutions that permitted, and even conduced, behaviors characteristic of “savagery.”

Given this conclusion, I would like to think that Veblen would give his approval to the New Word Fellowship (discussed in my [“Worship”](#)). For the Fellowship is designed not only to bring well-being to participants during the course of Fellowship sessions, but designed to facilitate the generation of creative ideas. Ideas specifically that will help place participants in the prophetic tradition (as interpreted in “Worship”).

The Tradition to which I make reference in “Worship” has an orientation to human well-being (and survival), and the “theory” underlying that Tradition is (I would argue) the theory that I have presented in this essay. So that, e.g., it was the theory that guided Elijah, Amos, and Jesus (unbeknownst to them, of course); the theory that guided the thinking of Charles Fourier and Thorstein Veblen—and scores of others through history.

Members of this Tradition—a Tradition that, by the way, got underway prior to Bible times, as I note in “Worship”—have been both remembered and ignored—the latter in the sense that their messages have not been taken seriously, or have been deliberately distorted. *This “practice” must not continue, as we are living in perilous times.* The Tradition must come to the fore, and not just in a “lip service” sense—for the sake of our survival, if nothing else; and the New Word Fellowship can play a key role in that “revival.” The reader, then, is urged to become an initiator of such a Fellowship—if “gifted” in that direction.

Behavior Domains

James B. Gray

Recently, while “surfing” the internet, I happened upon an article, by an anthropologist, on the “evolution” of cooperative behavior in primate groups. As I started reading the article, I was reminded once again of the intellectual vacuity and specious reasoning that is so common in the literature in this field of study. More importantly, however, I was motivated to write (for my own benefit) a brief critique of the article, and to begin thinking about “behavior” *per se* as a field of study.

As some ideas began coming to me, and I started writing them down, the idea occurred to me that a flaw common to many behavior studies is that they fail to specify the “domain” of relevance for the study. It occurred to me that the reasons this factor is important are that:

- Studies are strictly comparable only if they pertain to the same domain.
- Conclusions drawn from studies undertaken in one domain are not directly applicable to conclusions from studies of behavior in a different domain. Unless one understands how the two domains differ in relevant attributes, one cannot legitimately—as a careful scientist—“translate” the results from studies in one domain to another. That is, one cannot accurately state the relevance of one set of conclusions for a different domain.

To illustrate this latter point, consider the former tendency to conclude—as a “scientifically-based fact”—that because aggressive behavior is a notable feature with certain “close” species (in DNA terms), it “follows” that humans are killers by nature. This is to say nothing about the tendency of some to make the groundless (from an empirical standpoint) claim that all lifeforms have a “selfish gene”—one which, in fact, overrides all other conceivable causal factors, thereby causing all lifeforms to be selfish “by nature.”

If conclusions of this sort appeared only in obscure academic journals read by virtually no one, the fact of their questionable intellectual nature would have little impact on the society. But such is not the case: supposedly scientific conclusions regarding human selfishness and aggressiveness have been widely publicized, and have thereby provided, to those in our society in positions of power, an excuse to continue *their* selfish/aggressive behavior. An excuse which, in being accepted by non-elite members of the society (because, after all, it is “scientifically-true” information) tends to inhibit non-elite people from challenging the elite. Fortunately, increasingly this pessimistic viewpoint regarding “human nature” is currently being challenged by researchers such as Frans de Waal and Robert Sussman.

Given that I came to perceive that the question of behavior domains was one that had importance beyond the academic, I resolved to create a classification of behavior domains—to help us gain a better “handle” on the subject. The purpose of this essay, then, is to present the resulting classification, and make a few comments relative to it. Please keep in mind that the classification presented here is meant to be *suggestive*, rather than *definitive*.

A Classification of Behavior Domains

I. Pre-Fall²⁷⁴ Period

A. Normal Situation (involving, therefore, *acting*—i.e., “*self-initiated*” behavior)

1. Normal Consciousness

a. Factors operating continuously:

1) Physical Characteristics

a) Genetic endowment (physical characteristics, intelligence).

b) Acquired characteristics (e.g., handicaps).

2) Setting of behavior

a) Social institutions/way of life.²⁷⁵

b) Physical environmental context (e.g., weather and climate).

b. Factors operating discontinuously:

1) Affect (operates sporadically, with nature of behavior dependent on nature of affect)

2) Energy level.

a) Fatigue level.

b) Illness (temporary).

3) Temporary physical handicap

4) Intellectual factor

²⁷⁴ “The Biblical legend of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden seems clearly to describe the invention of agriculture.” Warren Johnson, *Muddling Toward Frugality*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978, p. 43.

²⁷⁵ Included here would be the degree to which the society was hierarchical vs. egalitarian.

- a) Knowledge (increases over time, but not necessarily at constant rate).
 - b) Creativity.
 - 2. Super-Normal Consciousness (“Spirit”-motivated behavior—as described, e.g., by Paul in Galatians 5:27).
- B. Abnormal Situation (involving, therefore, *reacting*—i.e., *situation-initiated* behavior)
 - 1. Genetic endowment (physical characteristics, intelligence).
 - 2. Affect (fear, anger, envy, sadness, hunger, elation, etc.²⁷⁷).
 - 3. Learned (i.e., habitual) response.

II. Post-Fall²⁷⁸ Period

- A. Normal Situation (involving, therefore, *acting*—i.e., “self-initiated” behavior)
 - 1. Normal Consciousness
 - a. Factors operating continuously:
 - 1) Physical Characteristics
 - a) Genetic endowment (physical characteristics, intelligence).
 - b) Acquired characteristics (e.g., handicaps).

²⁷⁶ For a fairly lengthy—and brilliant—discussion of the subject see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

²⁷⁷ Affect, in some manifestation, might enter the picture as a causative factor if a predator is sensed or encountered, if a conspecific is acting aggressively toward one, if one has an accident, etc.

²⁷⁸ This might well be broken down into subperiods: (1) from the Agricultural Revolution to the Industrial Revolution; (2) from then to the Industrial Revolution; (3) from then to the Tertiary Activity Revolution; (4) the current period—because *growing* discordance itself would be expected to have an influence.

- 2) Setting of behavior
 - a) Social institutions/way of life.
 - b) Physical environmental context (e.g., weather and climate).
- 3) The Discrepancy (explained shortly)
 - a) Affect (fear, anger, envy, sadness, hunger, elation, etc.).
 - b) Psychosomatic illness.²⁷⁹
 - c) Ideology.
- b. Factors operating discontinuously:
 - 1) Affect (operates sporadically, with nature of behavior dependent on nature of affect)
 - 2) Energy level.
 - a) Fatigue level.
 - b) Illness (temporary).
 - 3) Temporary physical handicap
 - 4) Intellectual factor
 - a) Knowledge (increases over time, but not necessarily at a constant rate; also, after a certain point one may experience memory loss).
 - b) Creativity.

2. Super-Normal Consciousness: “Spirit”-motivated behavior.

B. Abnormal Situation (involving, therefore, *reaction*—i.e., *situation-initiated* behavior).

²⁷⁹ See the old, but still relevant, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man's Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960.

1. Genetic endowment (physical characteristics, intelligence).
2. Affect (fear, anger, envy, sadness, hunger, elation, etc.).
3. Learned (i.e., habitual) response.

At II.A.1.a.3) reference was made to “The Discrepancy,” with the addition that this would be explained “shortly.” Given that “shortly” has now arrived, I can now state that this term refers to the fact that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago, a co-development had occurred of humans as biological entities and their gatherer-hunter way of life. With the Agricultural Revolution, however, whereas ways of life changed (especially after the Industrial Revolution of about 1750), human biology remained basically unchanged over time. This meant that there began a growing discrepancy in the sense that increasingly humans were exposed to stimuli that were “unnatural” for them and, conversely, virtually denied exposure to stimuli that were natural for them; were forced to ingest substances that were unnatural for them and virtually prevented from ingested substances that were natural for them; and prevented from engaging in activities for which they had become “designed,” and virtually forced to engage in activities that were unnatural for them.

This growing discrepancy has had an impact on how one’s physiological system works (leading to psychosomatic illnesses), an impact on one’s emotions (e.g., a factor in engendering feelings of anxiety) and, consequently, on one’s behavior. That behavior has resulted in institutional and technological developments; and some of the developments that have occurred have resulted in the creation of ideologies—with those ideologies, in turn, impacting behavior. The various ramifications of The Discrepancy have been thought through by no one to date; as a consequence, I can only offer here a few ideas as to the effects of The Discrepancy. I would add only that it has been a major—if largely unrecognized—factor affecting the thinking and behavior of people over the millennia since the Agricultural Revolution began.

Given the above classification, we can think of “behavior domains,” such that within each such domain a certain set of causative factors operate. Thus, if one is to explain human behavior, one must first “locate” the specific behavior(s) to be explained in the correct behavior domain, and then ascertain what causal factors are operative in that domain. Finally, one must determine the actual role of each factor in the specific portion of the domain that it “occupies.”

Good advice, indeed! But advice that has yet to be taken seriously. Even those who are convinced that humans, by nature, are “good natured” have given inadequate attention to the behavior domains matter. Were the latter to do so, they could more carefully plan their research—and, thereby, reach conclusions that would be even more solidly based than those they have reached to date. Let us hope that this occurs, for we need such research findings as the basis for good decision-making—whether individual or collective.

Plans of Salvation: Matthew vs. Acts

James B. Gray

Christians often claim that apparent discrepancies in the Bible are just that—not *actual* discrepancies. After all, they continue, the Bible is the word of God, and *therefore* is incapable of containing real discrepancies. When confronted with apparent discrepancies, Christians who think this way engage are then forced to engage in intellectual gymnastics to explain away the “discrepancies”—forced, that is, to become involved in gyrations that fly in the face of common sense.

Others have gone into some detail in identifying contradictory elements in the Bible (e.g., Clayton Sullivan’s 2002 *Rescuing Jesus From the Christians*), and I have no intention here of repeating what has been noted before. Rather, I wish to focus on possible discrepancies relative to a theme that most Christians would regard as a central one for Christianity—that which is needed for *salvation*—and examine two portions of the Bible from the standpoint of their degree of correspondence one with another. The two portions I am referring to are a passage in the gospel of Matthew, and the book of Acts in its entirety.

The passage in Matthew to which I am referring is “The Final Judgment” section (verses 31 – 46) of Matthew 25—given that title by the editors of the Good News Bible that I own. Although no verse in this section explicitly states that a “plan of salvation” is presented in the section, it is clear from the content of the passage that that’s precisely what the section does contain. Specifically, the “plan” consists of six (6) types of proscribed actions put into Jesus’s mouth—this being the *only* such plan attributed to Jesus in the entire New Testament, in fact:

- Feed the hungry;
- Give drink to the thirsty;
- Receive strangers in your home;
- Clothe the naked;
- Take care of the sick; and
- Visit those in prison.

These injunctions are put in the mouth of “the King”—meaning, of course, Jesus (rather than Elvis Presley); but the context of the statements in the passage makes it clear that Jesus is delivering his version of the Ten Commandments—an abbreviated version with only Six. In light of Jesus’s earlier (22:39) “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” it’s clear that the intention of the Matthew 25 passage was to “flesh out” the “love your neighbor” principle, give it some “meat.” To, that is, give some *examples* of what it would mean *concretely* to follow the “love your neighbor” command. Not that the Jesus of this passage was saying that these are the

only kinds of behaviors consistent with the “love your neighbor” principle but, rather, that these are *some* of the kinds of behaviors that would be consistent with the principle. And the fact that the recommended behaviors are repeated *four* (4) times in the passage (in my Good News Bible, at any rate), is an indication that the writer of Matthew wished to emphasize the centrality of these “commandments.”

Whereas it is more-or-less obvious that this Matthew 25 passage presents a definite plan of salvation, it is not so obvious that the book of Acts does the same. I would argue, however, that although ostensibly Acts has as its purpose a narrative description of the early phase of Christianity (in the West, at any rate), the book can also be conceived as presenting a plan of salvation. Indeed, I would identify twenty (20) passages in the book that can be construed as “plan” passages; and although the “plans” in these passages differ one from another, I would argue that a certain general “plan” can be inferred from these twenty individual plans, as follows:

- The beginning point in the “journey” to salvation is to “recognize”—i.e., to believe—that Jesus was/is Messiah.
- Next, one must repent of one’s sins (must, that is, recognize *that* one has sinned, and then express sorrow, regret regarding one’s past behavior).
- This step must then be followed by a decision, on one’s part, to change the way one lives one’s life, change the direction of one’s life—so that one minimizes one’s sinning, ideally to the point of zero sinning.
- If one does this, one can be certain that God will forgive one of one’s past sins; He will, one might say, “wipe His slate clean” (God here being viewed as a bookkeeper of sorts, who keeps a record of all sinning).
- Because one can be assured that God will forgive one of one’s sins, one should expect to experience a feeling that a burden has fallen from one’s back; one can, that is, expect to feel that one is now *liberated* from the burden of sin that one had been carrying (the “burden” here being one’s *conscience* “telling” one that one had committed sins, and done nothing to atone for that sinning).
- If one does, in fact, have that sort of experience, a way of conceiving it is that it’s as if God has “washed away” one’s sins—has, that is, washed away the markings on his slate (recording one’s past sins) with a wet cloth. Therefore, to recognize this feeling to oneself, and before announcing it to others, one should undergo water baptism to symbolize this “washing away” of one’s sins.
- Another reason for undergoing water baptism is that, just as Jesus’s Spirit-filling occurred in conjunction with His baptism by John the Baptizer, so may *we* also experience Spirit-filling with *our* baptism. This is not inevitable, but *is* a strong possibility; so that given the positive implications associated with Spirit-filling, it is by all means advisable to become baptized, for this reason alone. But if one becomes baptized

under false pretenses (i.e., merely pretending that one has gone through the necessary preceding steps), watch out! Don't forget what happened to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1 - 11)!

Is this plan consistent with, or in conflict with, the plan attributed to Jesus in Matthew 25? Let us finally, then, make some comments relative to how the two plans compare:

- Whereas the Acts plan consists of a number of discrete steps, the Matthean plan makes no reference to steps and, rather, is simply a list of behaviors—behaviors that exemplify what might be entailed in following the command to love the neighbor.
- It follows that the Matthean plan places no requirement on one to recognize oneself as a sinner, to ask for forgiveness, or to become baptized.
- Whereas the focus of the Acts plan seems to be on the necessity of ceasing to sin (*only* sins of *commission* being implied here), the focus of the Matthean passage is on *positive* acts—*doing* rather than *not* doing. The Acts passage, in contrast, is by no means specific as to what sorts of positive actions are enjoined for the Christian.

What conclusions can we draw? Certainly the two plans are by no means identical, but neither are they in serious conflict. Rather, one way of perceiving the two plans is that one *supplements* the other. Does this then mean that we should fuse the two plans together to create *one* plan? Different people are likely to answer this question differently, but my answer is that the plan that should be given priority is the one in Matthew 25—thought of as providing *examples* rather than a definitive list of recommended specific behaviors.

As my “[Worship](#)” suggests, I am a believer in current revelation (from the Holy Spirit), so the portion of the Acts plan that refers to Spirit-filling and its implications has appeal to me. The rest of the Acts plan, however, strikes me as “churchy” and therefore suspect as being a plan “in tune” with the ministry of Jesus—i.e., as having authenticity. And because the idea of “steps” calls to mind, for me, a “guru” thought of as required to guide others into enlightenment—something that I find repulsive—I am “turned off” by the suggestion that a particular set of steps are involved on the road to becoming “saved.” I can concur with the idea that any given “seeker” will experience developmental phases; what I *cannot* accept, however, are the ideas that there is but one set of steps, and that a guide is needed to help one to navigate those steps.

Because the twenty sets of steps presented in Acts differ significantly one from another, Acts provides us with a basis for taking a “liberal” position regarding steps. The churches, however, have insisted on identifying a series of steps that *everyone* must follow; they thereby not only violate the spirit of Acts, but the spirit of the gospels. Another reason for declining the label of “Christian” for oneself!

A final comment that I would make relative to the two portions of the Bible given attention in this essay is that some scholars have argued that what motivated the (canonical) gospel writers (none of whom is known by name) to write their gospels was a felt need to combat the

“heretical” ideas expressed by Paul in his letters—letters which, evidently, were being rather widely circulated. For not only did Paul’s letters convey little in the way of biographical information about Jesus, they failed to clearly convey to the reader what Jesus was “about.” If anything, in fact, they gave a distorted picture of the nature of Jesus’s ministry: rather than presenting Jesus as a teacher/prophet, they presented him as a “savior” modeled after the saviors that were common to the pagan Mysteries so popular during this time.

If the gospel writers were attempting to “correct” the image of Jesus that Paul had been promulgating, what are we to say about the writer of Luke—given that this writer wrote not only the gospel of Luke but the book of Acts? My perspective on this question is that this writer on the one hand wished to portray Jesus accurately, but at the same time realized that the damage that Paul had done could not be undone. Having reached these conclusions, he decided to write a gospel that would contain some Mystery elements (e.g., in dealing with the circumstances of Jesus’s birth), but would basically present Jesus as a teacher/prophet—who frequently used the parable as a device for conveying his message. He also decided to write a “follow-up” book that would represent an amalgamation of the gospel perspective and the theology of Paul’s letters.

Why write the latter sort of book? Because various Jesus movements were underway, and “Luke” sensed that the movement that was most likely to be “successful” was the one that was beginning to develop a bureaucracy. A book such as *Acts* would be one useful to this bureaucracy, but also helpful in preventing it from becoming too Pauline; while his *gospel* would further help prevent it from getting too far off course. “Luke,” then, I regard as a highly pragmatic person who was not particularly enthralled at the direction that Christianity was heading, but wanted to shape its direction as much as he could—and therefore wrote both a gospel *and* the book of Acts. If this is the mentality that guided him, and he is now “up there” in Heaven, he must be amused that we moderns don’t “get” the fact that he was writing for a *contemporary* audience, *not* for us.

Mack's Theory of Christian Origins—and Mine

James B. Gray

- (1) *Christianity is a “paganized” version of Judaism—or, better, paganism with a thin Jewish veneer.*
- (2) *Orthodox) Christianity is, by its very nature, heretical.*
- (3) *The religion of Jesus became, with Christianity, a religion about Jesus—about, indeed, Jesus given the name “Christ.”*
- (4) *Christianity conquered the world, and in the process the world conquered Christianity.*
- (5) *“What do you think of Christianity?”*
“I think it's a good idea. Too bad it has never been tried.”

Most Christians seem to be under the impression that Christianity stems directly from the “ministry”²⁸⁰ of Jesus, by way of the apostles (Judas excepted, of course) and Paul. Insofar as Christians have this belief, the sources in most cases presumably are sermons, and “New Testament” readings heard while in church. A few Christians, however, likely gained this “knowledge” about Christianity from their reading of the New Testament book of Acts.

Some Christians have learned, in addition, that early Christianity was diverse, but only *apparently* so. They have learned (but probably *not* via church services!) that in the first few centuries of Christianity's existence many groups emerged that claimed to be Christian. But these groups, they have learned, were all “heretical”²⁸¹ ones founded by individuals who had at one time been “true” (i.e., orthodox) Christians, but who had (for whatever reasons) turned their backs on orthodoxy to follow some heretical path.²⁸² Thus, although in the first few centuries CE many groups existed which claimed the title “Christian” for themselves, only one of those groups—the orthodox one—carried forth, in an authentic manner, the ministry of Jesus and the

²⁸⁰This is an anachronistic term in that Jesus was not a “minister” in the sense that we think of that label today. I am, however, not aware of a suitable substitute, thus will continue to refer to Jesus's *ministry*.

²⁸¹On “heretics” see, e.g., Gerd Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Christianity*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Originally published in German in 1995; translated by John Bowden.

²⁸²For a brief discussion of this “classical” view, see Chapter 1 (“The Test of Scripture in an Age of Dissent: Early Christian Struggles for Orthodoxy,” pp. 3-46) in Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

apostles, these Christians sincerely believe.

Unfortunately, beliefs such as those summarized above, concerning Christianity's origins and early development, have no basis in fact:

- Acts gives a very incomplete, unbalanced—and inaccurate—history of early Christianity. Which is not to say that we understand early Christian history with any degree of thoroughness. However, enough *is* known to provide a solid basis for the assertion that Acts is grossly deficient as a work of history.
- It is known that several “lines” developed from the original apostolic group (assuming there was one²⁸³), not just a single (“orthodox”) one.
- Of the lines that emerged from the original group, Christianity was not one of them! Rather, either Christianity developed out of one of the early lines (which, e.g., may have “morphed” into a Christian group), or Christianity developed independently. Burton L. Mack argues for the first position (as we shall see below), I develop an argument that takes the second position (which argument is presented in the Section D below).
- The fact that several movements emerged from the original apostolic group (so that we lack a basis for declaring *one* of those movements as the only “authentic” one) means that it is reasonable to regard *all* of those initial movements as “orthodox” ones!²⁸⁴
- One might argue that because Christianity's relationship with the original apostolic group (assuming now that one existed) was an indirect one (via, i.e., one of the initial movements), there is reason to regard Christianity as a heretical development! That, in fact, *all* of the varieties of Christianity which emerged during the first four centuries of Christianity's existence were heretical!

Given the above facts (to be explored below), it is easy to understand some of the motivation behind the five statements that constitute the epigraph.

A great deal of ink has been spilled over Jesus and early Christianity, but so far as the latter topic is concerned (which topic is the focus of the present discussion) I have been especially impressed with the work of Burton L. Mack. Therefore, in the discussion to follow I summarize and

²⁸³Not all scholars accept the New Testament claim that Jesus had 12 disciples; some even doubt that he had any disciples, period. The latter position seems to be implicit in, e.g., Burton L. Mack's statement that “the people of Q did not think of Jesus as a messiah, did not recognize a special group of trained disciples as their leaders, . . .” *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, p. 48.

²⁸⁴If, that is, we insist on thinking in terms of the categories “orthodox” and “heretical.” In fact, however, it would be more appropriate to apply the label “orthoprax” rather than “orthodox” to the initial Jesus movement groups (a point that should be clear later).

critique some of the points he makes in *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*,²⁸⁵ then follow that discussion with a presentation of my own “take” on Christianity’s origins. Mack’s *Who Wrote* is one of those rare books that is comprehensive in scope, which presents an intricate and erudite argument, and which is free of theological bias (i.e., free of dishonesty!). It is, thus, worthy of careful analysis—despite having been published over a decade ago. (Which is not to say, however, that Mack’s presentation is without problems—as we shall see later.) The reader should be cautioned, however, that my commentary on Mack’s book is basically restricted to just two of the book’s chapters—reflecting the fact that my interest is primarily on Christianity’s origins (i.e., the history of Christianity during the first century CE), not its history during the first three or four centuries.

My “plan” for the ensuing discussion is as follows. In the first section I present a summary of Mack’s critique of the New Testament book of Acts. In the second section I summarize, and comment upon, Mack’s discussion of the early “Jesus movements” which emerged from the original apostolic group. In the Section C I focus on what Mack has to say about the emergence of *Christianity* per se. Then, in the Section D I present (via four subsections) my views concerning the origins and early development of Christianity. The Conclusion section is then devoted to a commentary on the five statements that constitute the epigraph, followed by a brief “pitch” for a new religious “denomination” that I am proposing.

*Giving Acts the Ax*²⁸⁶

Mack discusses Acts in his Chapter 9 (“Inventing Apostolic Traditions,” pp. 225-50), which chapter is the lead-off chapter of his Part 3 (“History and the Christian Myth”). Acts is especially given attention in his “The Acts of the Apostles” section (pp. 228-39) of the chapter. Mack notes (p. 228) that the book was likely written late in the first quarter of the second century CE; and indicates that he agrees with most scholars that the author of the book was the same individual (a male) who wrote the gospel of Luke (the identify of that author not being known with certainty).

Mack refers to Acts as (p. 228) “a work of absolute genius.” And a few pages later he refers (p. 231) to the book as “great writing. [and then adds] It is also marvelous fiction.” (!) That is, Mack sees the book as conveying little in the way of historical truth. In fact, Mack sees the book as having been written from (what I would call an) ideological perspective, specifically a “centrist” one; i.e., “Luke” (or whoever he was) wrote a book which masked the controversies that actually existed during the first century CE, producing (p. 232) “a sort of common denominator gospel.” The author, Mack explains (p. 232), “did not want either a Pauline *kerygma* [i.e., proclamation], a Christ cult salvation, a Jesus movement enlightenment, a Petrine-Jamesian Jewish-Christian ethic, or any of a number of other interpenetrations of the gospel to

²⁸⁵ HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

²⁸⁶ See also Chapter 10 (“The Big Switch: Christ for Jesus,” pp. 131 – 49) in Barrie Wilson, *How Jesus Became Christian*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008.

surface. His centrist leanings determined that he dilute all these mythologies in the interest of a single articulation of the gospel”²⁸⁷] In addition, Mack argues (p. 230) that the *reason* the author of *Acts* took a centrist position is that he “wanted Christianity to be recognized [by Roman officials] as a religion that was good for the Roman order[,] and thus worthy of Roman support.” As a religion, also, that had moved beyond its Jewish origins and earlier association with Judaism.

Not only did “Luke” present (consciously or otherwise) Christianity as a religion “fit” for Roman society (unlike its parent Judaism, with its often trouble-making Jews). Luke’s conception of Christianity was (p. 236) “very Greek” (a point for which Mack provides evidence). Luke saw Christianity as a religion that was about the inculcation of self-control on the part of the individual, self-control being (p. 238) “the bottom line for Luke” As such, Luke was writing a history that fit the intellectual tenor of the times, for self-control was (p. 238) “the most prized virtue and most discussed issue among philosophers of the Greco-Roman age.” By writing a history that used self-control as a fundamental value, Luke wrote a history that presumably would appeal not only to intellectuals of the period, but to gentiles in general. Whether this was Luke’s intention is not clear; but the fact that Luke wrote *Acts* using a Greek mindset meant that his book’s orientation was in line with the thinking of gentiles in the Roman Empire—making his book more acceptable to the gentile mind than it otherwise might have been.

Perhaps the most notable feature of *Acts* is that it presents a theory of history that the emerging “orthodox” Church found to its advantage. (It is for this reason that one can regard *Acts* as an *ideological* work, whether or not Luke intended as such.) This theory is developed in such a clever, subtle way, that in reading *Acts* one tends not to notice that one is being presented with an historical account that is “just” a theory. In fact, I must admit that I myself have so internalized this theory that I have a difficult time convincing myself that it is just a theory—what Mack refers to (p. 236) as a “fiction of continuity.”

Luke develops his point of view especially via speeches attributed to Peter, Stephen, and Paul; as Mack points out, *Acts* contains 15 major speeches. The upshot of these speeches is that through the ages God instructed people through leaders who had been inspired by the Holy Spirit. The prophets of the “Old Testament” (i.e., the Hebrew Bible) had been such leaders, as had been Jesus; and after Jesus there were the apostles—who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as described in a famous passage early in *Acts*. Mack notes, perceptively, that this is not just a theory of history. It is (p. 233) a theory which validates the authority of the apostles. Mack adds (p. 237) that Luke’s treatment of Paul (the principal “hero” of the book) is such as to forge a link with the (orthodox) Church that was developing (with its elders, bishops—i.e., its bureaucratic structure).

²⁸⁷Keep in mind that Mack’s reference to “Christ cult salvation,” etc., here is occurring late in the book. These terms are discussed by Mack earlier in his book, in chapters that I review below. Thus, the meanings of at least some of the terms on Mack’s p. 232 should become clearer as my presentation proceeds.

Mack argues (p. 238) that although “Luke” had previously written the gospel of Luke (a “biography” of Jesus), Luke’s Acts serves to shift the focus from Jesus to the apostles (thereby making Luke obsolete, one might argue). And by giving authority to the apostles, Acts indirectly gave authority to the emerging orthodox Church. Mack adds that associated with the latter was a shifting of orientation from Jesus’s teachings to creedalism; i.e., Christianity started to become a religion *about* Jesus. Unfortunately, Mack fails to make clear why the emergence of an organization which claimed that its authority derived from Jesus (via Jesus’s disciples) would *thereby* become an organization which ceased to carry forth Jesus’s ministry but, rather, began to become a religion *about* Jesus (“creedalism”). A religion which, that is, betrayed its putative founder by subordinating the heart of the founder’s ministry to a focus on events in that founder’s life (birth, death, resurrection).

Is there something about organizations *per se* that leads to such corruption? Are *hierarchical* organizations in particular subject to such prostitution? Unfortunately, Mack resorts to glibness on this matter, and fails to provide (in Chapter 9, at any rate) an adequate explanation of why Christianity (which purportedly began as a religion which *continued* the religion of Jesus) changed into a religion that was merely *about* Jesus—and in the process ignored, or even inverted, the teachings of its putative founder, burying the latter quietly. (Or confining them to that “temporal corral” known as Sunday.)

Early Jesus Movements and Their Background

Chapter 1 (“Clashing Cultures,” pp. 19-41) of Burton L. Mack’s *Who Wrote the New Testament?* is devoted primarily to a discussion of the “setting” within which Christianity emerged. The point that Mack emphasizes in this chapter is that the centuries that preceded the birth of Jesus were a period of societal disturbance, upheaval. From the time of Alexander (“the Great”) of Macedonia (356-323 BCE) down to the time of Jesus’s life (and beyond), there were numerous wars of conquest, and these wars resulted—directly and indirectly—in a great deal of migration within the Near East and Mediterranean Basin. Some of the migration was a result of forced relocation; some was in response to an anticipated invasion (“push”); and some was of the “pull” variety. The latter is explained largely by the fact that during this period numerous Hellenistic cities were built (on p. 24 Mack points out that in Palestine alone 35 such cities were built prior to the Roman-Jewish war), and for some this meant the possibility of employment opportunities.

Most of the migration that occurred during this period was to cities (new and pre-existing); and, not surprisingly, (p. 27) “people tended to seek out their own kind [i.e., people with a similar ethnic / cultural background] in foreign cities and form ghettolike communities” And from a larger-scale perspective, the result was (p. 26) “peoples of all ethnic extractions [now] living together in cities without a common culture” The new residents of a city were people who had lost touch with their cultural roots, which for most meant difficulties in coping. (For some, migration may have been an exhilarating experience, but this would not have been true for most migrants.) Understandably, most made efforts to keep their culture alive, with ghettoization contributing to that objective. But another common response to being placed in a new

environment was (p. 28) the formation of fellowships²⁸⁸ (*koinonai*).²⁸⁹

Robert L. Wilken (see previous footnote) notes (p. 35) that fellowships/associations were usually ethnically based, although some consisted of members of a given occupation.²⁹⁰ If a fellowship was ethnically based, members would attempt to re-create the culture of the home area: as Mack points out (p. 28), the fellowships that were created often substituted for the societies from which the migrants had come—societies which may have been destroyed by invading armies. But whether a fellowship was ethnically or occupationally based, the purposes (Wilken, p. 35) were social, recreational, religious, and educational; and most functioned as burial societies. *All* fellowships were religious in the sense that a given fellowship usually would adopt a certain god or goddess as patron; and when members gathered for a communal meal, they engaged in religious rites in honor of that deity.

Members of these fellowships tended to be drawn from the artisan, merchant, and shopkeeper classes (some members even being slaves). A given fellowship tended to have about 50 members; each fellowship tended to be independent of all other fellowships (although a number of fellowships might have the same god or goddess as patron). I should add that although neither Mack nor Wilken says as much, it would seem that some of these fellowships were incubators for some of the Mystery religions that became very widespread throughout the Mediterranean Basin (especially its eastern part). (Later—in Section D—I discuss, briefly, these Mysteries.)

The Jewish synagogue might be considered a special type of fellowship, but these differed in various respects from the fellowships founded by gentiles. First, most were founded by Jews who had moved from Palestine in search of (commercial) opportunities elsewhere: “pull tended to be involved in their migration rather than “push.” Second, although gentile fellowships tended to be independent one of another (as did synagogues), all “diaspora” Jews looked to Jerusalem (with its temple) as the center of their religion. Third, whereas the fellowships were all religious, their primary orientation seems to have been socializing and recreation.²⁹¹ The synagogues, in contrast, were primarily (although not exclusively) religious in orientation, featuring the reading of, and commentary upon, Torah. None of the fellowships had a comparable book—which fact

288 For a recent extended discussion see Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

²⁸⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, in Chapter II (“Christianity as a Burial Society,” pp. 31–47) of his *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003 [second edition]), notes that there are several other possible terms: *collegium* (association), *hetaeria* (political club), *factio* (club), *corpus* (association). Interestingly, he notes (p. 32) that (some) Christians of the early second century referred to their *ecclesia* (churches), but that the Romans did not apply that term to Christians. Rather, they referred (p. 33) to Christians as *Christiani*; for them, an *ecclesia* was a city’s political assembly.

²⁹⁰ Did the latter tend to be ethnically diverse or ethnically homogeneous? Wilken fails to clarify this point—as does Mack.

²⁹¹ Those associated with a Mystery had rites associated with initiation, and stages of advance in the religion.

gave the synagogues a certain natural advantage over the gentile fellowships. And it is a fact that many synagogues attracted gentiles (“god-fearers”) to their services, although this did not result in many conversions (of men especially, given the circumcision requirement). Festivals were associated with both gentile fellowships and synagogues, but different festivals, of course.

If one response to the loss of cultural moorings during this period was the formation of fellowships,²⁹² another was the development of systems of thought more comprehensive than had existed before. In the case of Judaism there was the attempt by Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) to interpret the Septuagint (i.e., the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) in a philosophical-allegorical manner that would be meaningful to Greeks. But although the work of intellectuals was important, the development that had more popular appeal was (Mack, p. 31) astrology—a system of thought that made ethnic boundaries irrelevant. And related to this development was a growing interest in luck, dreams, and magic. I should also note that philosophical schools arose that also had an individualistic orientation, thus had something in common with astrology. As Mack notes (p. 34), “Stoics especially, but Cynics as well, gave up on the idea that building abstract models of perfect societies might change the world for the better. They instead turned all their attention to the plight of the lone individual. Personal virtue was what mattered, they said.” An orientation that was important in that it influenced the Jesus movements that developed (and may have influenced Jesus as well).

It was into this world that Jesus was born, but Mack offers little commentary on Jesus himself. He states that (p.39) “Jesus grew up in Galilee and apparently had some education. He certainly was bright enough, judging from the movements that remembered him as their founder.” But Mack then goes on to declare (p. 39) that “it is all but impossible to say anything more about him as a person, much less write a biography about his life. The ‘memories’ of him differ, and they are so obviously mythic that the best we can do is to draw a conclusion or two from the earliest strata of the teachings attributed to him.” Mack does not deny that Jesus likely was more than a teacher. What he seems to be saying, however, is that although Jesus may also have been a healer/exorcist, if he had been *only* a healer/exorcist, it is unlikely that any (lasting) movement would have arisen in his name. Thus, it is the fact that Jesus was a teacher that (ultimately, at any rate) makes his name a household word today. However, there is a paucity of contemporary information about Jesus, so that the most that we can do (in coming to conclusions about him) is to study the movements that arose in his name, and then make inferences (i.e., “reason backward”) about him: (p. 39) “We have to infer what kind of a teacher he was from the teachings that developed in these movements.”

What inferences does Mack believe we can reasonably make about Jesus (from our knowledge of the movements that developed in his name)? Mack writes:

- Jesus (p. 39) “must have been something of an intellectual, for the teachings of the movements stemming from him are highly charged with penetrating insights and ideas.”

²⁹²Mack states (p. 29) that “the association should be seen as a very creative and important moment in the history of Western civilization.” He adds: “The Romans were not always comfortable with the existence of associations.”—because they were suspicious of meetings occurring in private settings.

- He must “have been capable of suggesting ways to live with purpose in the midst of complex social circumstances.”
- He “was not a constructive, systematic thinker of the kind who formulate philosophies or theologies.”
- He “did not create a social program for others to follow[,] or a religion that invited others to see him as a god.”
- He “saw things more clearly than most, made sense when he talked about life in his world, and must have attracted others to join him in looking at the world in a certain way. What we have as evidence for this is the way his followers learned to talk about living in the world. They said that Jesus had talked that way too.”
- The teachings of Jesus evidently were a “collection of pithy aphorisms that strike to the heart of ethical issues, not the usual proverbs, maxims, or principles that one would expect from the founder-teacher of a school tradition”

Mack then develops this latter point, first by noting that the aphorisms (and also parables?) seemingly attributable to Jesus reveal (p. 40) “the interweaving of two themes that mark the genius of the movement.” On the one hand, these aphorisms involve “a playful, edgy challenge to take up a countercultural lifestyle.” Mack adds: “The closest analogy for this kind of invitation to live against the stream is found in Cynic discourse of the time. It does appear that Jesus was attracted to this popular ethical philosophy as a way for individuals to keep their integrity in the midst of a compromising world.” I might add that the fact that the Hellenistic city of Sepphoris was just four miles from Jesus’s presumed home of Nazareth makes it believable that Jesus could have come in contact with Cynic philosophers while working with his father in that city.

Second, the aphorisms refer to a “kingdom of God.” Indeed, many scholars before Mack have argued that that concept was the dominant one in Jesus’s ministry, adding (and Mack would agree) that a clear meaning of “kingdom of God” is not evident in the aphorisms that are believed to derive from Jesus. Mack points out that at times Jesus seemed to be referring to an ideal society—one “under God,” of course; indeed, the very phrase “kingdom of God” seems to be a literal reference to a *society* having God as king—or at least a society within which God “reigned” in some meaningful sense.

But, Mack notes, at times Jesus seemed to mean by “kingdom of God” (p. 40) an alternate “way of life that anyone could take [i.e., live] at any time.” That is, at times Jesus seems to have given the concept a purely individualistic meaning—and intended such an interpretation on the part of hearers. Insofar as Jesus gave the concept an individualistic meaning, his teaching was, therefore, closely related to Cynic teaching of the time. Mack adds (p. 40) that “the kingdom of God [concept] in the teachings of Jesus was not an apocalyptic or heavenly projection of an otherworldly desire. It was driven by a desire to think that there must be a better way to live together than the present state of affairs. And it called for a change of behavior in the present on

the part of individuals invested in the vision.” (I should note that Mack’s claim that Jesus was not an apocalyptic is a controversial one that is not widely shared among scholars. See, e.g., Bart D. Ehrman’s excellent *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*.²⁹³)

Mack concludes his discussion of Jesus by arguing (seemingly, at least) that Jesus *deliberately* left the “kingdom of God” concept ambiguous so that it would be given these two different interpretations—a *societal* one on the one hand, and an *individualistic* one on the other. Mack notes (p. 40) that the former interpretation reflects Near Eastern thinking (Hebrew thought in particular), the latter Greek thinking (as especially represented in Stoic and Cynic philosophy). Was Jesus consciously *trying* to appeal both to the Hebrew mind and the Greek one? Was he hoping that his teaching would foster creative thinking that would meld Hebrew and Greek thinking? An intriguing thought! At any rate, Mack raises the interesting possibility that (p. 40) “Jesus’[s] genius was to let the sparks fly between two different cultural sensibilities, the Greek and the Semitic.”

As to the movements that developed in Jesus’s name, Mack’s first reference to them is at the end of Chapter 1, where he refers to three “lines,” each having the “kingdom of God” as its central concept. Regarding the three lines, he notes (p. 41) of one that it “can be traced from the earliest Jesus movement, through Matthew’s gospel, to later communities that understood themselves as Jewish Christians.^[294] These people emphasized lifestyle and found a way to bring the behavior of [people in] the Jesus movement into line with more traditional codes of ethics. This approach produced communities that lasted for centuries, such as the Ebionites and Nazareans [sometimes spelled “Nazoreans” by others²⁹⁵]. But they were not the ones that gave birth to the Christianity of the Bible.”

Two facts are notable about this statement. First, Mack refers to an “earliest” Jesus movement, and states regarding it that its orientation was to *lifestyle*, and to retaining ties with Judaism. Second, Mack notes that it was *not* this particular Jesus movement that gave rise to Christianity! (A statement that will be regarded by many as a bombshell!)

Mack identifies as a second line one which (p. 41) “takes off from the Sayings Gospel Q, runs through the Gospel of Thomas where Jesus’[s] teachings were understood to bring enlightenment

²⁹³New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²⁹⁴Although the term “Jewish Christian” is a common one in the scholarly literature, it is surprising that Mack uses it. For as we will see later, Mack sees the “Jesus movement” as having begun with six groups, all consisting (initially at least) of Jews, none of whom called themselves “Christians.” Mack argues in Chapter 3 that one of those “streams” in northern Syria “morphed” into a “Christ cult,” from which Christianity is derived. Christians who had a Jewish background would properly be called “Jewish Christians,” but members of other Jesus movement strands with a Jewish background should not be called “Jewish Christians”: they were Jewish, but were not Christians. Mack should either have put “Jewish Christians” in quotation marks here, or not used the term at all (my preference is for the latter).

²⁹⁵See, e.g., pp. 268-80 in Étienne Nodet and Justin Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity: An Exploration*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

about one's true self, and ends up in gnostic circles. These people cultivated the invitation to personal virtue[,] and thought of the kingdom of God as an otherworldly dimension of spiritual existence where true human being had its origin and end. This approach may have been the most attractive form of Christianity ["Jesuanism" would be a better term to use here²⁹⁶] during the second to fourth centuries." Although this line originated during the first century, and continued in existence beyond the fourth century, its "heyday" was the period specified by Mack. After that period it was (p. 41) "squelched by the institutional form of Christian tradition that called itself the church." So that although it *did* continue to exist after the fourth century, it was forced to "go underground" for centuries, and has always (including now²⁹⁷) been a minor stream in terms of numbers of people involved.

Regarding the third line that Mack identifies ("the church"), he states (p. 41): "The church's trajectory had worked its way through northern Syria and Asia Minor where the Christ cult formed to justify the inclusion of both gentiles and Jews in the kingdom of God. It was this trajectory that converged on Rome, developed the notion of the universal church (from *catholic*, meaning 'general'), and created the Bible as its charter." What is of especial interest in his discussion in Chapter 1, then, is his point that the Roman Catholic church developed from the third line (of the three), which line was *not* the earliest one.

We need to qualify the above discussion by Mack in one respect. He states that of the three lines that he had identified, the first was the earliest. However, a little later (p. 47, in Chapter 2) he seemingly contradicts this assertion by arguing that "Q will put us in touch with the first followers of Jesus." Recall that in the discussion on p. 41 Mack had placed the Q people in the *second* of the three lines identified, the second strand not being the earliest one. Thus, in Chapter 1 he seems to be saying that certain "Jewish Christian" groups (Ebionites, Nazareans) were the earliest representatives of the Jesus movement, but in Chapter 2 he seemingly gives this honor to Q groups. It's not clear where Mack stands on this issue, but I will assume here that he really believes that the Q group(s) was the earliest Jesus movement.

The theme of different lines is taken up more fully in Chapter 2 ("Teachings From the Jesus Movements," pp. 43-73). Unfortunately, Mack's discussion of (what are now referred to as) "streams" in Chapter 2 is not fully consistent with his analogous discussion (of "lines") in

²⁹⁶Given Mack's use of the term "Christian" in this book he should not have referred to this line as a Christian one. I hereby suggest use of the term "Jesus movement" as a general term to encompass the totality of the movement, and follow Mack in dividing that movement into a "Christian" component and (what I will call) a "Jesuan" one. The latter component of the Jesus movement can be thought of as consisting of at least six strands (as we shall see shortly).

²⁹⁷There is, however, considerable interest in gnosticism currently. See, e.g., Andrew Harvey, *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam, 1998.

Chapter 1—and Mack fails to account for this discrepancy. Let us, however, ignore the fact of a disconnect here, and briefly summarize Chapter 2. The key point Mack makes in this chapter is that (p. 44) “we are able to identify at least seven different streams within the Jesus movement, though there may have been many more.” The seven: (1) A “family of Jesus” group, (2) the Community of Q (which produced the Sayings Gospel Q), (3) the Jesus School (which produced the pre-Markan pronouncement stories), (4) the True Disciples (who produced the Gospel of Thomas), (5) the Congregation of Israel (whose members composed the pre-Markan sets of miracle stories), (6) the Jerusalem Pillars (about whom we have scant information), and (7) the congregations of the Christ. Mack seemingly suggests, in Chapter 2, that these seven “streams” all emanated from the Original Group,²⁹⁸ and that all arose and developed independently one from another. Whether he *intended* to suggest that is another matter.

In Chapter 2 Mack discusses, briefly, each of the first six “streams,” then devotes all of Chapter 3 to the “congregations of the Christ” (from which groups Christianity arose). Thus, following Mack, I will summarize what Mack says about the first six streams below, then in the next section examine what Mack writes about the seventh strand (the Christian one):

1. *Q Communities*²⁹⁹

These “communities”³⁰⁰ may have been the first Jesuan groups. (As I indicate above, it is not clear where Mack stands on this issue.) Our knowledge about them is inferred from Q itself--which scholars see as having been produced by one or more members of one or more Jesuan communities. What makes these Jesuans of particular interest is not only that they may have been the first Jesuans (so that their views/practices may best express what Jesus himself was “about”), but the fact that “layers” have been (purportedly) discovered in Q which suggest a certain course of evolutionary development with these Jesuans.

The “heyday” of these Jesuans appears to have been roughly the period from the late 20s to the early 70s CE (i.e., from the time of Jesus’s adulthood--and “ministry”—to the time of the Jewish War, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and, possibly, the {temporary} removal

²⁹⁸In using this term I do not mean to imply that this group had a fixed membership during the course of Jesus’s ministry (e.g., “the twelve”). Rather, I am referring to people who were strongly attracted to Jesus’s ministry, some enough so to join his “entourage” and follow him from place to place—assuming that Jesus acquired a group of “followers” who followed him in a literal sense. (The New Testament suggests that he had followers in that sense, but some scholars would question this.)

²⁹⁹See Mack’s, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) for an extended discussion.

³⁰⁰Note that “community” is not used here to refer to a contiguous area (without inliers) occupied by a group of people, those individuals interacting one with another on a regular basis (but not to the exclusion of interaction with others), and having some sense of being members of a distinct group (etc.). Rather, it is used in the narrower sense of people who, during some of their “off” time, meet at an appointed meeting place (usually within a building) to participate in certain specified activities (rituals, socializing, etc.).

of Jesuans from Judea). These Jesuans evidently viewed Jesus as a teacher much like the Cynic itinerants who wandered from community to community throughout the Mediterranean Basin—i.e., viewed Jesus as a being who was very much a real, alive man, not a god who came to earth. Although these Jesuans may have seen Jesus as a Cynic-like teacher, their Hebrew heritage was also evident in that the kingdom of God concept dominated their thinking. They evidently thought of the kingdom of God as a hypothetical *society* within which God ruled in the sense that the kingdom's “subjects” subjected themselves to God's commands: they not only *knew* what those commands were, but attempted to *live* in accord with them. Mack argues that the lifestyle adopted by these Jesuans is one that today we would label as a “countercultural” one: these Jesuans lived *in* “the world,” but resolved to not live *by* the world's values. And, Mack identifies (p. 49) seven (7) themes of especial importance in the thinking of these Jesuans (which I will not identify here).

Mack argues that at some point prophecy, apocalyptic pronouncements of judgment, and the issue of loyalty (to the group) entered the thinking of these Jesuans (these inferences drawn from the Q₂ portion of the “book”). He adds that the figure of John the Baptizer was invented during this period to serve as a “foil” of sorts for Jesus. After the Jewish War, Mack argues that a Q₃ layer was added, this again reflecting a change in the thinking of Q people. By this time, Mack argues, it was thoughts of patience and piety than dominated the thinking of Q people.

2. *The Jesus School*

Scholars have for some time recognized that one of the components of some of the gospels is *pronouncement* stories. These are anecdotes whose purpose is to indicate the *character* of a teacher.³⁰¹ The stories might, e.g., be created in such a way as to emphasize the cunning intelligence of the teacher in question—i.e., his ability to respond quickly and brilliantly to intellectual challenges posed to him by non-followers. Pronouncement stories associated with teachers were common at the time, and likely most of the stories associated with a given teacher—including Jesus—were not “true” in the sense that we understand today; i.e., they did not recount actual events—including verbal exchanges—that had occurred. Rather, they were “true” in the sense of illustrating and illuminating the character of the given teacher, as understood by followers of the teacher.

Mack argues that Jesuan groups with which pronouncement stories were associated (to the virtual exclusion of other characteristics) may have developed especially in the Tyre and Sidon areas. He adds that the pronouncement stories associated specifically with Jesus tended to emphasize questions of purity, and cast Jesus in the role of a *lawyer* (rather than, e.g., that of a Cynic-like teacher). Mack observes that the author of Mark made use of many of these pronouncement stories, and in these stories tended especially to pit Jesus against the “Pharisees.” The latter fact likely indicates that members of this school—*rather than Jesus himself*—came into conflict with scribes and Pharisees. Mack adds that members of this school did not develop

³⁰¹Mack, *The Lost Gospel*, Chapter 10.

the view that Jesus partook of divinity, and that he had died a martyr; nor did they develop an apocalyptic view of divine judgment upon their opponents at the end of history.

3. The True Disciples

The Gospel of Thomas, in Mack's view, was produced by a group of Jesuans ("True Disciples") who viewed Jesus as a teacher, but one of esoteric knowledge. These people emphasized the point that people are spiritual beings who need to recognize this fact about themselves. They seemed to promote the attainment of a "higher" state of consciousness, arguing that that was what Jesus's ministry was actually about. Thus, their emphasis was not on a supposed future existence, but on the here and now; and rather than focusing on humans as physical beings, they emphasized humans' spiritual nature—advocating that people attend to their spiritual nature. For these Jesuans, the kingdom of God was a kingdom of *light*—i.e., of intellectual enlightenment and an altered state of consciousness.

Mack notes that Jesuans in this group portrayed Peter and Matthew as antagonistic, resisted the development of an apocalyptic mentality (something often associated with those whose orientation is to a supposed afterlife), resisted a codification of ritual activities, and had no belief that Jesus had been resurrected (and subsequently ascended to Heaven). As Mack notes (p. 64), for these Jesuans "There was no need for Jesus to perform miracles, prophesy the end of the world, die on the cross as a savior, or come again for the final judgment. His ubiquitous presence was already known everywhere his hidden teachings were correctly interpreted."

4. Congregations of Israel

Of these Jesuans Mack asserts that they perceived Jesus primarily as a miracle-worker—and made a parallel between Jesus and (the legendary) Moses and Elijah. Evidently the Jesuans in these groups were more socially marginal than were other Jesuans, were an ethnically mixed group, and were associated especially with Northern Palestine. They developed their particular theological ideas out of a need (as socially marginal people) to give themselves "legitimacy" in the eyes of fellow Jews, argues Mack.

5. Jerusalem Pillars

Evidently Peter, James (the brother of Jesus), and John (along with nameless others) constituted a group centered in Jerusalem. These Jesuans accepted Jewish purity rules regarding table fellowship, and likely many other features of Judaism as well. There is a later tradition that has these Jesuans leaving Jerusalem for Pella on the eve of the Jewish War of 68-70 CE.

6. The Family of Jesus

It is known that James the brother of Jesus became, after Jesus's departure, the leader of a group of Jesuans centered in Jerusalem, and that leadership of this group remained in the hands of relatives (and their descendants) of Jesus for several decades. The beliefs/practices of these Jesuans are not clearly known; it can be assumed, however, that they accepted much of Judaism—and were perceived by Jews as a sect within Judaism (like, e.g., Essenism) rather than

members of a different religion. Mack does not devote a separate section to this group, thus it is not at all clear how they differed from the Jerusalem Pillars—especially given that James (the brother of Jesus) was a Pillar, per Mack.³⁰²

Let me now offer some comments on the seven Jesus movement groups identified by Mack (although only six of them have been given attention so far):

- Of these seven groups, Mack sees only the last one as being a *Christian* group! As I indicate in an earlier footnote, I suggest that we use the label “Jesuan” for the other six groups.
- Of these seven “streams,” only the last (the Christian) one has survived down to the present (although one might argue that the True Disciples group is still alive³⁰³).
- The fact that the Christian stream of the Jesus movement has survived down to the present, but that the six “Jesuan” streams all died out long ago (with the exception noted above), should not be interpreted as meaning that the Christian stream best reflected the ministry of Jesus: positive connotations should not automatically be associated with a stream that merely has “survival value.” The fact that the Christian stream was *not* the earliest stream in the Jesus movement does not, of course, *in itself* prove that that stream reflected Jesus’s ministry less well than the other six streams; but (as we shall see) the fact of the matter is that the Christian stream has *never* reflected Jesus’s ministry well!³⁰⁴
- Related to this point, some may give a positive “spin” to Christianity’s development by arguing that “inventiveness” has characterized its history.³⁰⁵ But just because a movement is “inventive” over time is no proof that it has been “operationalizing” well the principles of the movement’s founder; one might argue, indeed, that the religion of Christianity has (and has had) very little in common with the ministry of Jesus—that, in fact, it even *inverts* the principles of that ministry!

³⁰² Wilson (*op. cit.*, p. 71), referring to a 2006 book by James D. Tabor, notes that the James, Thaddaeus (Judas) and Simon listed in Matthew 10:2 – 4 as brothers of Jesus, may also have been among “the twelve.”

³⁰³ In the form of gnosticism.

³⁰⁴ One might argue, though, that during the period of the Social Gospel movement of a century ago Christianity (or a significant portion of it, at any rate) came close to reflecting rather well Jesus’s ministry (insofar as that ministry was interpreted at the time).

³⁰⁵ See, e.g., Alan Race’s “Christianity: 2000 years of Inventiveness” lecture at the www.multifaithnet.org web site.

I should also add, regarding Mack's discussion of seven Jesus movement streams in Chapter 2, that although Mack presumably had reasons for lumping Christian groups into a single group ("congregations of the Christ"), the fact of the matter is that considerable diversity developed within this strand. That is, a number of strands could be identified within the Christian ("Christ cult") stream, but Mack does not explore this matter in any detail in his book. Also, I should note that although Mack's discussion of the "Jesuan" streams emphasizes their differences, he does identify several similarities (p.45):

- Each had "involvement in the idea of the kingdom of God"
- All "were engaged in some kind of group formation."
- It is likely that each group developed "the practice of meeting together for meals." (By which Mack apparently is saying that each created fellowships/associations.)
- All "considered Jesus the founder of their movement."

Mack adds that beyond these similarities, "each group developed differently, and the different views and practices that developed [in Jesus's name] are evidence for the fact that Jesus did not provide a program for starting a new religion."³⁰⁶

Before leaving these six ("Jesuan") Jesus movement groups, I should note that Mack apparently would argue that all consisted just of Jews at their origin; that some (but not all) may have acquired gentile members, but Mack does not specify which ones, or indicate how, when, or why this occurred (except for the "Christ cult" group discussed in his Chapter 3). Mack implies that the members of a given Jesus movement, upon joining that movement, ceased contact with their synagogue—which is difficult to believe.³⁰⁷ The "Jewish Christian" groups such as the Ebionites and Nazareans that Mack had referred to in Chapter 1 may have maintained contact with their synagogue, and the Temple; but Ebionites and Nazareans are nowhere referred to in Chapter 2. What happened to them? How could Mack forget about them so quickly?! Finally, not only does Mack imply, in Chapter 2, that the six Jesus movement groups discussed in that chapter ceased contact with the local synagogue (and the Temple). He also implies that they had no contact one with another. His failure to refer to possible interactions between the six groups may

³⁰⁶Note that *if* Jesus had been an apocalyptic (as many scholars believe), it is also true that one would not expect him to have started a new religion. Thus, one cannot argue that the fact that Jesus did not start a new religion proves that he was not an apocalyptic. (In fact, one can plausibly argue that the fact that many were expecting a Second Coming after Jesus's departure [Paul being one example] lends support to the assertion that Jesus was an apocalyptic who expected that God was about to make an appearance, and preached to that effect. That what Jesus meant in declaring that the kingdom of God was at hand, was that God "soon" would arrive in Jerusalem, and begin reigning.)

³⁰⁷And if they did, what sorts of meetings would they have? Would they copy the synagogues? Would they copy gentile associations? Would they copy a Mystery? But how would they learn about how Mysteries conducted their meetings?

reflect a lack of information on the groups. But Mack should have at least commented on why he wasn't going to say anything about relationships between the six groups. And beyond this, Mack should have made explicit just what it is that we *don't* know about them.

The Development of Christianity

The portion of Mack's discussion that has most relevance for the present one is his theory, presented in Chapter 3 ("Fragments From the Christ Cult," pp. 73-96), concerning the development of the "Christian" stream. Mack begins this chapter by arguing that during the first century CE, in northern Syria (Antioch³⁰⁸ most likely), the Jesus movement present in that area underwent change over a period of about 25 years: it got transformed into (p. 75) a "cult of a god called Jesus Christ." Note that in Chapter 2 Mack had seemingly suggested that the Christ cult was one of seven Jesus movements, and had implied that it had developed—as had the others—independently of the others. Now in Chapter 3, however, he argues that the Christ cult developed *out of* one of (what I am calling) the Jesuan movements. So that what Mack is now asserting, in effect, is that there were six *Jesuan* Jesus movements that developed early on, and that a (single) *Christ cult* Jesus movement emerged from one of those Jesuan groups.

On p. 77, in referring to "the transformation of a [Jesuan] Jesus movement into a Christ cult," he seemingly suggests that *one* (and *only one*) of the six Jesuan "streams" gave rise to the Christ cult—but without specifying which one. However, on p. 79, in referring to "the Jesus movements from which the Christ cult developed," he seems to be saying that the Christ cult developed from *two or more* of the six streams—but, again, without specifying which ones.

From which of the six strands identified in Chapter 2 did the Christ cults develop? Mack doesn't say. But given his discussion of the *three* strands in Chapter 1 (on p. 41), and his statement there that Christianity did not emerge from the first of the three strands (the "Jewish Christianity" strand that gave rise to the Ebionites and Nazareans), Mack must believe that the Christ cults emerged from the *second* of the three strands—the strand which included the Q and Thomas substrands (and other ones as well?) that Mack identifies in Chapter 2. Thus, I will assume here that Mack meant to state that the Christ cult emerged from either a Q group or a Thomas group; and given the context of Mack's discussion, it seems most likely that Mack would identify a Thomas group as the most likely one to have given birth to the Christ cult. The chart on p. 311 of his book does not necessarily confirm this conclusion; however I will hereafter assume that Mack meant to say that the Christ cult emerged from a Thomas group.

1. A Compositional Summary

Having now been presented with a new perspective on the seven Jesus movement groups discussed by Mack in his Chapter 2, it will be useful briefly to summarize Mack's thinking on the development of Jesus movements before proceeding to a discussion of his theory regarding the development of a Christ cult. In summarizing Mack's thinking I will use a "compositional" perspective that emphasizes the religious-ethnic composition of the groups, and how they may

³⁰⁸Note that per Acts 11:26 the term "Christian" was first used in Antioch.

have experienced compositional change over time. I will feel free to “fill in the blanks” where I see omissions in Mack's discussion.

Of the six Jesuan Jesus movement streams identified by Mack, it would seem that the Pillars and Family of Jesus groups were ones that consisted of Palestinian Jews, not only originally but through time. It also seems likely that these were the oldest of the six groups (although Mack does not claim this status for them); and it is likely that both of these groups were short lived (especially the Family of Jesus group). It is generally believed that Jesus's brother James assumed leadership of Jesus's followers upon Jesus's death; and also believed that leadership (in Jerusalem, at least) remained in the hands of members of Jesus's family for several generations. This group presumably ceased existence about the time of the Jewish War, and the same may have been true of the Pillars group. (Keep in mind that, as I noted in the previous section, Mack does not clearly differentiate between these two Jesuan groups.)

The other four Jesuan groups (Q groups, Jesus School, True Disciples {i.e., Thomas group}, and Congregations of Israel) do not seem to have been associated with Palestine in their origin. There are at least two possible explanations regarding how they got started. One possibility is that they were started by Pillars who went outside of Palestine and missionized; presumably they missionized diaspora Jews specifically, so that the initial Q groups (e.g.) consisted just of diaspora Jews. Another possibility is that the other four groups were founded by diaspora Jews who, while in Jerusalem, came in contact with members of the Pillars group (or the Jesus Family group). This contact inspired them to start their own Jesus movements after their return to their home cities (Alexandria, Corinth, Antioch, etc.). The result was the initiation of at least four different Jesuan groups (the ones identified by Mack), all of which consisted solely of diaspora Jews at the time of origin.

Mack argues that a Jesuan group that had formed in northern Syria (a Thomas group?)—a group that initially consisted just of diaspora Jews—at some point acquired some gentile members; that is, at some point this group became a “mixed” group from the standpoint of religious background. And at some later point still this (now) mixed group got transformed into a Christ cult group. Mack implies that this original Christ cult group then “mothered” other Christ cult cells (further implying that *all* Christ cult cells that formed subsequently were rooted, genetically, in this Syrian group). And Mack then goes on (in subsequent chapters of his book) to argue that Christianity developed out of the various (and variegated) Christ cult cells that formed, beginning in the latter part of the first century CE. (Note that my interest here is not so much with Christianity *per se*, as with the development of the Christ cults which, according to Mack, gave birth to Christianity.)

2. The Emergence of the Christ Cults

Mack uses three types of sources for his discussion on this subject, the first being passages in Paul's letters which scholars believe to be pre-Pauline, thereby giving information (when properly interpreted) about the Christ cult movement in its incipient stage (before Paul had an impact on it). Mack notes (p. 77) that this pre-Pauline evidence takes the form of, e.g., creedal formulas (e.g., Romans 4:25), summaries of the Christ myth (I Corinthians 15:3-5), poems in

praise of Christ as God (Philippians 2:4), mottoes (I Corinthians 10:23), and doxologies (Philippians 4:2). And Mack presents a rather lengthy discussion (pp. 79-96) of these passages. (Indeed, the amount of space devoted to a discussion of those passages tends to divert the reader's attention from the basics of his argument. Because of this, I give only minimal attention to Mack's discussion of those passages.)

A second source for Mack's discussion is scholarly research concerning the mythology that was "in the air" in the period shortly after Jesus's death. Mack notes regarding this (pp. 78-79): "The mythology [of relevance for Christianity's origins] was rooted in the logic of martyrdom, or the Greek tradition of the noble death, but it drew as well upon a number of other myths that were current at the time. These included a Jewish wisdom tale about the vindication of a falsely charged righteous man, the Greek concepts of hero [³⁰⁹] and divine man, ancient Near Eastern myths of the king as God's son, and the story of Israel as a people who lived constantly under the eye of God." The final source used by Mack was the work of critical scholars who had researched Roman (and Greek, Hebrew) society as it existed during the first century CE and before.

Mack's theory regarding the origin of a Christ cult can be presented in terms of the following scenario:

- a. A Jesuan group (Thomas group?) in northern Syria (Antioch perhaps) began to acquire gentile members. (It had begun as a group composed only of diaspora Jews.)
- b. As with other Jesuan groups, this one was centered (initially, at least) on the kingdom of God concept. "Cells were formed [Mack states on p. 77] by those who met together regularly to discuss the kingdom of God. Patrons emerged who were able to host these meetings at their homes. Following common custom for associations such as these, meals became the occasion for gathering, and eating together became the sign of belonging to the new fellowship. The new fellowship challenged erstwhile ethnic and social prejudices because its constituency was mixed, and it unleashed heady thoughts about new ways to experience human community. What if such a fellowship was exactly what Jesus had meant by his talk of the kingdom of God (or so these [incipient] Christians seem to have framed the question)?" (Refer to the discussion previously given above regarding the ambiguity of the "kingdom of God" concept in Jesus's ministry; did the members of this new group arrive at a new way of interpreting "kingdom of God" that involves neither of the two interpretations mentioned above? If so, they demonstrated some interesting creativity!)
- c. The fact that this particular group was (now) mixed promoted interpretation of the

³⁰⁹Gregory J. Riley has emphasized the hero concept. See his *One Jesus Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired Not One True Christianity, But Many*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997. See in particular Chapter 2 ("The World of Jesus the Hero," pp. 15-30). A more recent related book by Riley is *The River of God: A New History of Christian Origins*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.

kingdom of God concept in (p. 78) “social vision” terms. (“What if such a fellowship was exactly what Jesus had meant by his talk of the kingdom of God . . . ?”)

- d. At about the same time that members of the group began to give this interpretation to “kingdom of God,” they came to feel a need to justify the existence of their group as a mixed (Jewish-gentile) group; specifically, there arose a felt need to (p. 86) “justify the inclusion of gentiles” in the group. Which suggests that the group had begun as one consisting mainly (if not solely) of (diaspora) Jews, but rather quickly had acquired some gentile members.
- e. “The need [p. 86] to justify the inclusion of gentiles [in the group] called forth a venture in mythmaking that shifted attention away from Jesus the teacher and his teachings to focus on his death as a dramatic event that established the movement’s claim to be the people of God.” That is, (p. 75) “Jesus’[s] death . . . [came to be] understood [by these people] to have been an event that brought a new community [i.e., their particular fellowship(s)] into being.” In other words, these people developed a theory that explained their existence as a mixed group, this theory having “facts” regarding Jesus’s death as its basis.
- f. As this “understanding” (of how they had come into existence) grew, there was, quite naturally (in Mack’s view, evidently), a (p. 75) “shifting attention away from the teachings of Jesus and away from a sense of belonging to his school. It engendered instead an elaborate preoccupation with notions of martyrdom, resurrection, and the transformation of Jesus into a divine, spiritual presence.”
- g. Once Jesus came to be thought of in terms of “spiritual presence,” certain cultic developments followed. “Hymns, prayers, acclamations, and doxologies were composed [,] and performed when Christians met together in Jesus’[s] name. Meals and other rituals of congregating celebrated both Jesus’[s] memory and the presence of his spirit.”
- h. This incipient Christ cult group started referring to Jesus by (p. 84) the title “*christos*,” Greek for “*messiah*, meaning anointed, a mark of dedication to an office or social role, such as that of a prophet, priest, or king.” (Presumably, this group was the first to use this title for Jesus.) But they gave “messiah” a meaning rather different from what it had in Palestine. There, a messiah was thought of (at the time) as a potential liberator (from Roman rule).³¹⁰ These incipient Christians, however, came to think of a “Christos” as having been, not literally anointed, but, rather, (p. 84) “approved by God for divine service” And, they came to think that (p. 92) “Jesus *became* the Christ by virtue of his obedience unto death.”

³¹⁰Before “the Christian proclamation of Jesus, there were no Jews, as least so far as we know, who believed that the Messiah was going to be crucified. On the contrary, the Messiah was to be the great and powerful leader who delivered Israel from its oppressive [Roman] overlords.” Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, p. 93.

- i. Beyond this, at some point the Christ cult folk came to see Jesus not only as an *approved* (by God) human, but as a *lord* (as evidenced, e.g., in the pre-Pauline poem given in Philippians 2:6-11). As Mack points out, assigning the title “lord” to Jesus meant that he was now given a role of *sovereignty*. Note that the title “lord” means that (for these incipient Christians) God not only approved of Jesus, but that Jesus himself was a god! Indeed, the poem in Philippians (p. 92) “says that Jesus Christ is the name of the lord that is above every other lord. That is an absolutely stupendous claim.” [How true!]
- j. Mack next (p. 93) asks “what caused [the devilment of] the thought that Jesus had been or was a god.” And goes on to present a rather lengthy (but unconvincing—to me) explanation (which I do not summarize here).

This, then, is summary of how a Thomas group (?) in northern Syria got transformed into a Christ cult group.

In addition, in the course of his discussion Mack offers several comments that merit attention:

- k. He states (p. 84) that the significance of Jesus's death “as a martyrdom had been worked out [by these incipient Christians] without any need to imagine a resurrection.” That is, the Christ cult in its incipient stages did not emphasize the “fact” that Jesus had been resurrected; this was an idea that got grafted onto Christianity later (and was never a part of any strand of Jesusanism?!). Thus, the “Easter event” which many claim as the starting point for Christianity was *not* (Mack seemingly suggests) in fact; and, of course, the first Christians did not celebrate Easter because for them the “fact” of Jesus’s resurrection was not terribly important (Mack believes). Besides, they thought of “resurrection” differently than we do (as Mack tries to explain on p. 83). Mack argues that (p. 84) “God had proven his approval of both Jesus and Jesus’[s] cause by raising him from the dead.” But the emphasis in thinking, of these first Christians, was on the “fact” that Jesus had died for our sins, rather than the “fact” that he had been resurrected: it was Jesus’s death that had significance for these Christ cult people, *not* Jesus’s (alleged) resurrection; they believed in Jesus’s resurrection, but that event held little significance for them relative to Jesus’s death.
- l. Mack states (p. 87): “There is not the slightest hint in any text of the Pauline corpus that he or the Christians [whose Christianity] to which he was converted thought of Jesus or themselves in opposition to the temple establishment in Jerusalem, as Mark will say in his gospel.”
- m. The myths created by the first Christians contain (p. 87) “the first references we have to the death of Jesus as a crucifixion” Mack adds that “we really have no way of knowing anything about the historical circumstances of Jesus’[s] death. There is no reference to Jesus’[s] death as a crucifixion in the pre-Markan Jesus material.” Thus, although some scholars regard as a firm benchmark the “fact” that Jesus's death was by

crucifixion,³¹¹ Mack denies this claim. He states that the oldest evidence that we have regarding Jesus lacks any suggestion that Jesus was crucified.

- n. On the final page (p. 96) of Chapter 3 Mack makes an interesting observation regarding the strand of the Jesus movement that became (Mack claims) transformed into a precursor of Christianity: “What happened, apparently, was the transformation of a Jesus movement into a religious association on the model of a mystery cult with political overtones.” Here Mack “admits” that Mystery religions were popular throughout the Mediterranean Basin, and notes that Christianity came to share many characteristics with these religions. This latter fact seemingly plays little role in Mack’s thinking about how Christianity developed, but *does* play a prominent role in the alternate explanation that I offer in Section D.

3. *Commentary on Mack’s Theory*

In this subsection I comment on each of the 14 points (a - n) made in the previous subsection (the first points constituting Mack’s theory regarding Christianity’s origins, the latter points being observations offered by Mack in the course of his presentation):

- a. Mack’s basic thesis regarding the development of Christianity is that it involved (p. 77) “the transformation of a Jesus movement into a Christ cult,” which suggests that *one* of the six Jesuan Jesus movements (assumedly a Thomas group in northern Syria) got transformed into a Christ cult (which, in turn, gave birth to Christianity). On p. 79, however, Mack refers to “the Jesus movements [note the plural] from which the Christ cult developed,” now suggesting that the Christ cult developed out of at least *two* Jesuan groups. I assume that this is an error on Mack’s part, and that he believes that the Christ cult emerged from *one* (and only one) Thomas group. Presumably, this group began as one composed solely of diaspora Jews, but that at some point it began to acquire gentile members. Unfortunately, this starting point for Mack raises a number of questions, questions for which Mack provides no answers.

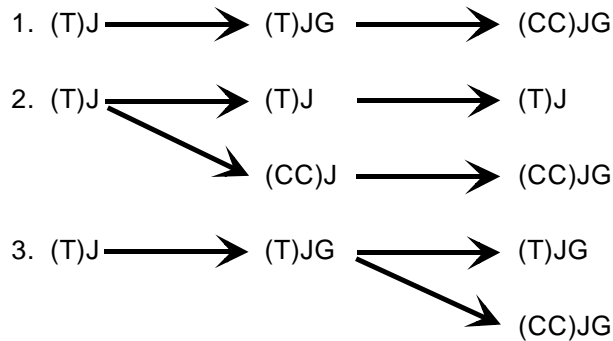
First, regarding the “transformation” to which Mack refers, he is unclear concerning *how* it occurred. There are three possibilities, as indicated in the figure below:

Scenario 1 - In this case a Thomas group (originally consisting just of Jews) at some point began to acquire some gentile members, and at a still later point changed from a Thomas group to a Christ cult group.

Scenario 2 - Again we begin with a Thomas group that consists solely of (diaspora) Jews, and at some point a subgroup emerges from that group that is ethnically Jewish, but has

³¹¹“The single most solid fact about Jesus’[s] life is his death; he was executed by the Roman prefect Pilate, on or around Passover, in the manner Rome reserved particularly for political insurrectionists, namely, crucifixion.” Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000, p. 8.

become a Christ cult group. That subgroup then, at a later point, begins to acquire some gentile members, so that it becomes a Christ cult group with both Jewish and gentile members. Meanwhile, the Thomas group which had given birth to this Christ cult group remains a Thomas group consisting solely of ethnic Jews.



Key:

(T) = Thomas group
 (CC) = Christ Cult group
 J = Jewish in composition
 JG = Jewish-Gentile in composition

Scenario 3 - The starting point here is also a Thomas group whose members are all diaspora Jews. This group at some point begins to acquire gentile members. At a still later point some of the members of the group (a mixed group of Jews and gentiles) begin to develop deviant ideas—and leave the Thomas group to form a new group. This new group quickly emerges as a Christ cult group. Meanwhile, the (mixed) Thomas group continues through time as a mixed Thomas group.

Of these three possibilities, which one does Mack identify with? It's not at all clear. It would seem, however, that in referring to the “transformation” of a Jesus movement group (a Thomas one specifically) into a Christ cult group, he has Scenario 1 in mind. Which does not, of course, mean that it is the most plausible³¹² of the three possibilities.

Second, assuming Scenario 1 (i.e., that the Thomas group in northern Syria “morphed” into a Christ cult group), and assuming further that it acquired gentile members *prior* to

³¹²Presumably, evidence does not exist—and will *never* be obtained—that would establish which (if any) of the three scenarios should be accepted. Thus, if one sets out to confirm Mack's theory, and addresses this specific point, one will need to use inferential reasoning (something to which Mack has given his blessing—as I noted earlier).

that transformation, *why* did this particular Thomas group acquire gentile members? There are really three questions involved here: (a) What was it about the diaspora Jews in the group that would *enable* gentiles to join the group? (b) What was it about the diaspora Jews in the group that would *attract* gentiles to the group? (c) What characteristics did the gentiles attracted to the group have that differentiated them from other gentiles in the area who were not so attracted? None of these questions are addressed by Mack, even in a speculative fashion.

Third, a Thomas group (per Mack) in northern Syria got transformed into a Christ cult group. Assuming that Thomas groups existed elsewhere, did any other such groups also become mixed, and get so transformed? Did any of the other Jesuan groups (exclusive of the Pillars and Family of Jesus) become mixed? If so, did any of them also get transformed into Christ cult groups? Again, Mack is silent on these questions.

Fourth, Mack seemingly implies that the diaspora Jews who started the Thomas group in question immediately cut their ties with Judaism (i.e., their synagogue and the Temple in Jerusalem); and that by thereby shedding much of their Judaism they were enabled to attract some gentiles to the group. (Given that the group was a fellowship, and that meals likely were a prominent feature of the group, the Jews in the group would need to have largely abandoned the "purity" orientation of Judaism.) Does Mack assume that those who formed this Thomas group (and other ones--and other Jesuan groups) immediately cut their ties with Judaism? He doesn't say. But it does not seem likely that they did (this statement applying especially to Pillars and members of the Jesus Family group, it would seem).

- b. Although Mack avoids the question of how and why this Thomas group acquired gentile members, he asserts that the acquisition of such members had an important *consequence*. He says that all of the Jesuan groups had as their central focus the kingdom of God concept, but that this Thomas group in northern Syrian—*because* it became a mixed Jewish-gentile group—began to perceive their group (more broadly, their *kind* of group) as a kingdom of God group. That is, the members of the group, once it started to become mixed, began to become *conscious* of that fact, and this stimulated them to entertain the possibility that their fellowship *was* a kingdom of God in miniature: they had, they discovered, created a kingdom of God without knowing it! Up to that point, although they had discussed among themselves the kingdom of God concept, the concept had remained rather nebulous. The concept achieved clarity for them only when they discovered that they had unwittingly created a kingdom of God! A discovery that excited them, and therefore stimulated increased cohesion within their social group and increased intellection.

This, at any rate, is what Mack seems to be saying. I must say that I find Mack's speculation here interesting; and although he claims that his theory is based in part on some solid research by critical scholars, I find his reasoning here too precious to be true. Mack may very well be correct in asserting that this Thomas group was like all other Thomas and other Jesuan groups in having a primary orientation to the kingdom of God

concept. But did this particular Thomas group go beyond all other Jesuan groups in coming to think of *itself* as what Jesus meant by “kingdom of God”? I find this hard to believe.

- c. Mack states that the mixed nature of this Thomas group promoted interpretation of the kingdom of God concept in “social vision” terms. That is, the group came to think of their own group as a kingdom of God group; indeed, they (more generally) came to think of their *kind* of group as a kingdom of God group. Which implies that their proselytizing (insofar as they did any—and it would seem that members of such a group *would* be motivated to proselytize) would consist not merely of attempts to “convert” others, but to get others to create fellowships resembling their own. The goal being a proliferation of such fellowships (for what else would having a “social vision” mean?). Unfortunately, Mack is silent on the question of whether these people proselytized; and, if so, what the nature of their proselytizing was.
- d. A key point in Mack's theory is his assertion that the diaspora Jewish leaders of this incipient Christian group, in “discovering” the fact that they were a mixed group, felt a need to “justify the inclusions of gentiles” in the group. And that this precipitated theologizing on the part of members (diaspora Jews in particular, assumedly). I find this assertion utterly unconvincing. It seems to me that Mack sees theologizing occurring with this group, and in searching for an explanation for that activity “hits” on the notion that consciousness of the group’s mixed nature was what “caused” the theologizing. It doesn’t make any sense to me why a group that was already mixed would suddenly feel uncomfortable about that fact! It would seem more plausible to argue that what caused the group to become mixed in the first place was a certain degree of theological likemindedness; after all, the group started as a “religious” one. (And all fellowships of the time were religious—some more than others, of course, as I pointed out earlier.) This is not to say that after the group became mixed, it would not continue to theologize (for one would expect that the addition of gentiles to the group would be a powerful stimulus to further theological development). The point, however, is that it is simply not believable to think that there was not a certain degree of likemindedness, in religious terms, between gentiles joining the group and the diaspora Jews already in the group.
- e. Mack argues that the theologizing which took place to justify the inclusion of gentiles in the group resulted in a sort of thinking that involved a shift in attention from Jesus as a teacher to certain events in Jesus’s life (Jesus’s death in particular, which came to be “understood to have been an event that brought a new community [i.e., their particular fellowship] into being.” This shift of thinking occurring within the span of about 25 years! In a sense, what Mack is saying here is that the Thomas group in question had started as group which practiced (in its own way) the religion *of* Jesus, but that within a 25 year period the group’s religion became a religion *about* Jesus. That their need to develop an explanation for their being mixed resulted in a theory that caused them to focus on certain events in Jesus’s life beyond the teaching portion, Jesus’s death being event given most attention (initially at least). In the first place I find such a change within such a short period to be unbelievable. And in the second place I find the

reasoning that Mack uses to explain why the shift in orientation occurred to be unconvincing. The addition of gentiles to the group would be expected to result in theological innovation. But what's unbelievable here is that the *motivation* for theologizing was a felt need to explain the mixed nature of the group. It's so much easier to believe that the addition of gentiles to the group *per se* was what resulted in theological development, for that addition would necessarily have involved some friction—which friction undoubtedly would have been a stimulus to theologizing.

- f. Mack argues that the theorizing/theologizing associated with the group involved a “shifting attention away from the teachings of Jesus” and “engendered instead an elaborate preoccupation with notions of martyrdom, resurrection” If we assume that the Thomas group in question did in fact begin to develop theological ideas that centered on notions of martyrdom, etc., why does it necessarily follow that the group would cease thinking of Jesus as a teacher? Why is this an either/or matter? Mack seemingly assumes that the development of theological ideas centered on (purported) events in Jesus's life necessarily will result in a diminution of interest in the teachings of Jesus; but what is the basis for that assumption? Is this a *logically* necessarily relationship? Is it a relationship with an *empirical* basis? Mack fails to make clear why a diminution of interest in Jesus as a teacher occurred as this Thomas group was engaged in the process of developing its theological ideas. He *says* it happened (and may be correct on that matter), but fails to tell us *why*.
- g. Mack argues that once Jesus came to be thought of in terms of “spiritual presence,” certain cultic developments followed from the emergence of that perception: the development of hymns, prayers, rituals of congregating (such as shared meals, with rituals developed to accompany the meals), etc. Indeed, Mack seems to imply that *only* cultic developments developed in response to the emergence of this perception of Jesus. If Mack intended to say this, I find this a curious assertion given that Paul drew rather different implications from the perception of Jesus in terms of “spiritual presence.” One of the most important distinctions that Paul made was that between life in the Spirit and life controlled by “human nature” (what today we would term “*socialized* nature”). He argued (Galatians 5:19-21) that those whose lives are dictated by “human nature” engage in immoral, filthy, indecent behavior (e.g., they get jealous/angry, they get drunk, they have orgies, they separate into parties, they fight, etc.), and in addition they engage in witchcraft, and worship idols. Those, however, who allow the Spirit to direct their lives—i.e., those who have (Galatians 5:24) put to death their human nature, with all its passions and desires—have rather different lives. For the Spirit (5:22-23) produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. And, Paul adds, there is no law (Jewish or otherwise) against such behaviors. There *is*, of course, the question of who/what Paul was referring to by “Spirit”: God or Jesus. I would argue, though, that in Paul's mind there was no clear distinction between the two; so that when Paul referred to “Spirit,” one can interpret this as a reference to *Jesus's* “spiritual presence.”

- h. Mack states that at some point this developing Christ cult began to refer to Jesus using the title “*christos*,” which is Greek for the Hebrew *messiah*, which means “anointed.” In Hebrew usage one (a king usually) who had been anointed was literally anointed with oil, this marking the anointed one’s “appointment” to an office (or social role). Mack, however, argues that the members of this emerging Christ cult began to think of Jesus as having been approved by God for divine service, and thought of that approval as constituting a sort of anointment. In effect, they were saying that God’s approval can be shown in ways other than literal anointing.

But is this *really* why they applied the title *christos* to Jesus (and later even made it a part of his name: Jesus Christ)? During the time of Jesus’s life *messiah* was most commonly thought of (by Palestinian Jews) as an expected (or at least hoped-for) divinely-ordained deliverer, liberator, “savior” (from Roman rule). Not necessarily as one who would be literally anointed with oil, but one “appointed” by God—appointed specifically, however, to bring about deliverance from Roman rule. Diaspora Jews *could*, conceivably, have borrowed this “appointment” aspect of *messiah* from their Palestinian brothers/sisters, and applied it differently (i.e., in the way specified by Mack). The problem I have with this, however, is that when the early Christians referred to Jesus as *Christ*, they seem to have had in mind the meaning that “savior” had in the Mysteries. What I see with the title *christos* is that the diaspora Jewish members of the Thomas group in question took the Hebrew title *messiah*, translated into Greek as *christos*, but then gave it a meaning that it had *never* had in Hebrew society; gave it a meaning, rather, that it had in “*pagan*” society, that of a *savior* associated with the Mysteries. Thus, what I see here is a borrowing from the Mysteries (a disguised borrowing, to be sure). A borrowing that may have involved some innovation in that it also involved *some* borrowing from Judaism, to create a new concept; but a borrowing that involved but minimal innovation in that it was heavily influenced by the savior concept of the Mysteries.

- i. Mack argues that members of this developing Christ cult at some point came to perceive Jesus as approved by God (and therefore a *Christ*), and then later came to see Jesus as a *lord*, i.e., a god. (How Jesus, as a divine being, was related to God had not been worked out yet. In fact, this did not get worked out until the fourth and fifth centuries CE.) In other words, Mack sees a progression as having occurred. But *was* there in fact? An alternate view is that some of the early Christians came to perceive Jesus as having been approved by God, while others “skipped” this “stage” and came to regard Jesus as a divine being. What makes such an argument plausible is the fact that during the fourth century (especially) diverse views were presented concerning the nature of Jesus’s divinity; and the defining characteristic of a “heretic” was that s/he had an “incorrect” view on this matter.
- j. Regarding Mack’s explanation of why Jesus came to be thought of as a god: Given that I did not summarize that explanation earlier, I will make no comment on that matter here except to say that although I find it somewhat believable that a gentile could come to see Jesus as a divine being, I find it very difficult to believe that anyone raised in Judaism (including in the diaspora) could bring himself/herself to think of Jesus as a divine being.

- k. Mack's statement that the earliest Christians, although believing in Jesus's resurrection, did not place much importance on that event is one likely to be shocking to many Christians. For Christians have been taught that the "Easter event" was the inaugural event for Christianity. What Mack is apparently saying is that for the six Jesuan groups that somehow developed out of the Original Group (which had surrounded Jesus), Jesus's resurrection either was an event not regarded as important, or an "event" that simply had not occurred. And that even the Christ cult that emerged in northern Syria from a Thomas group, although believing that Jesus had been resurrected, saw much more significance in Jesus's death: *that* had meaning for them, not Jesus's resurrection. I would add only that given that in all of the ancient religions (including Judaism and the Mysteries) sacrifice was an important component, it is fairly easy to believe that diaspora Jews striving to somehow carry forth Jesus's ministry would come to see Jesus's death as a sacrifice. For given that it was embarrassing to have the founder of one's movement die via execution by the Romans, and difficult to explain to others how a divine being could die, period, some theory had to be concocted to place a positive "spin" on Jesus's death (by execution). Developing a theory that placed Jesus in the role of a sacrifice was a clever ploy; whether the theory is (was) *believable* is another matter.
- l. Mack states that there is no evidence (despite what Mark says in *his* gospel) that the early Christians (including Paul) saw themselves as "in opposition to the temple establishment in Jerusalem" Yet Mack implies that all of those who started Jesuan movements used the fellowships they were establishing as substitutes for their synagogues (although some—especially Pillars and members of the Jesus Family group?—may have continued their allegiance to the Temple). Certainly the theology that the early Christians (at least) were developing was in conflict with Hebrew thought (of whatever school, except that it may have had certain features in common with the Therapeutae in Alexandria). And Paul (who apparently had had Temple connections prior to becoming "converted") is portrayed in the New Testament as one who developed ideas that many Jews objected to strongly. Thus, I fail to see the basis for Mack's assertion here.
- m. Mack states that we have no good evidence that Jesus died by crucifixion. He is likely correct on this point, but the fact that it came to be so widely assumed that Jesus had been crucified makes me believe that Jesus was, in fact, crucified. Whether this execution was initiated by Roman officials or by Jewish leaders is a question that I will not address here—although I must add that I reject utterly the assertion (one which has poisoned Christianity for centuries) that the Jews were "Christ killers."
- n. Mack, in summarizing what happened with the Thomas group in northern Syria, makes the revealing statement (p. 96) that there was a "transformation of a Jesus movement into a religious association on the model of a mystery cult with political overtones." This suggests that Mack "knows" that the "family resemblance" here likely is attributable to borrowing from the Mysteries (*heavy* borrowing, indeed), but bringing *that* fact in would spoil his theory. Given this, it is surprising that Mack even mentioned the Mysteries. Did he do so hoping that none of his readers would have knowledge about the Mysteries, and thus not make a connection? At any rate, I find it mind boggling that Mack, who

obviously has knowledge of the Mysteries, would fail to explore the similarities between them and nascent Christianity—offering us instead a theory involving fantastic reasoning and questionable assumptions. A theory purporting to be based on solid research by competent critical scholars, but one that is unconvincing nonetheless. Go back to the drawing board, I say! (But Mack is now retired [:(].)

In addition to the specific comments offered above, there are several general comments that I would make regarding Mack's discussion (as summarized above) of Christianity's formative years:

- Mack fails to comment on the matter of *why* several (six) Jesus movements began. That he sees more than one movement is offensive to the orthodox mind (which sees one true movement, and various “heretical” ones which developed later); given this fact, one would think that Mack would offer some explanation for why six movements developed. Providing evidence *that* six movements began is one thing; providing an *explanation* for why they developed is quite another, and Mack's discussion is deficient on both counts, but especially on the latter one.
- One would assume that there was some degree of interaction between different Jesus movement groups, between them and Jewish groups, and between Jesus movement/Jewish groups and the emerging Christian groups. From Mack, however, we learn nothing about such interaction. Did he regard such a discussion as beyond the scope of his study? As something regarding which we have little information? I wish that Mack at least had offered some speculative comments regarding interaction between these various groups.
- Mack refers to the Jesus movements as spreading within the Roman Empire, but offers no suggestions concerning *how* they spread. Did some members of a given cell act as missionaries, traveling to other cities in an effort to establish new cells? Did some members, in deciding to move to a different city (e.g., to pursue economic opportunities elsewhere), initiate new cells upon becoming re-established in the new cities? Were there disagreements within a given cell (e.g., personality conflicts) which resulted in some members leaving a given group and initiating a new one—perhaps even a new *kind* of group (e.g., members of a Q group leaving that group to initiate a Thomas group)? Mack is completely silent on this question.
- Mack shows no appreciation for the fact that societies are *systems*. That is, societies are comprised of different parts, and these parts function together in a more-or-less harmonious manner; that, at least, the various parts of a societal system support one another. Which means that for an idea or institution to have “survival value,” it must “fit” the societal system into which it is introduced. Which also means that an idea or institution—or religion—that is introduced into a societal system, and does not fit that system very well *need not* thereby die. There is the possibility that it can *adapt* to the system, and therefore continue in existence. It has been said that Christianity conquered the world, but that in the process the world conquered Christianity. Meaning that Christianity began with certain values associated with it, but that Christianity adapted by

shedding those values (except on Sundays!) in favor of “the world’s” values. Would that Mack had brought some sociological thinking into his discussion. Perhaps he felt that given the period of Christian history to which he was giving attention, such discussion would not be particularly valuable. Let’s give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that that’s the case. After all, Mack has been a fine scholar, and has made an invaluable contribution to the study of early Christianity.

My Theory

Over the years I have read numerous works touching on the development of Christianity (such as John Dominic Crossan’s tome³¹³), but have yet to find a book that satisfies my curiosity. Too many of the extant works have (what to me is) the wrong focus (on literature produced, rather than on the individuals/groups that produced it); and such descriptive terms as evasive, tedious, fragmented, incomplete, sterile, timid, misleading, arcane, and glib come to mind. And that doesn’t even include works that are explicitly apologetic (a euphemism for “blatantly dishonest”). As I have read various works, I have sensed that they have not answered my questions. Indeed, I have often felt that works concerned with the development of Christianity have been more of an *obstacle* to learning than a help—in that they have led me down blind alleys, and made it difficult for me even to formulate the questions that I have wanted answered.

It has taken me years to be able to formulate the questions that I have, but I have finally been able to articulate three basic questions (and a fourth question that stems from the answer that I would give to the first question). The literature “out there” on Christianity has not provided me with clear answers to my questions (although it has provided valuable clues), thus I have had to formulate the answers to my questions myself: in a sense, I have had to *create* answers to the questions. The purpose of this section, then, is to identify those questions, and provide my (provisional) answers to them. My three basic questions (the fourth will be identified and addressed after providing an answer to the first question):

1. Why is it that Christianity, whose putative founder was a Palestinian (indeed, Galilean) *Jew*, became a religion of *gentiles*?
2. Someone has observed that the religion of Jesus became, with Christianity, a religion *about* Jesus. How and why did this happen?
3. Why did Christianity become a world religion (i.e., a religion with millions of adherents worldwide)?

Let us begin by addressing the first question.

1. Christianity a Gentile Religion

³¹³Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity : Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus*. A HarperSanFrancisco Book. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1998.

I answer the question of why Christianity became a religion of gentiles by identifying a sequence of events that I would postulate. A given statement in this “argument” may lack in firm empirical support, but I see the argument *per se* as “yielding” the result whose explanation I am seeking. And because I am aware of no other argument that provides as good an explanation, I will accept my explanation until someone shows me a more convincing one. Here, then, is the explanation I offer for how and why Christianity became a gentile religion.

- a. A diaspora Jew present in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’s death learned about Jesus. (I will refer to this person as the Initiator, and proceed as if there was but one. In actuality, of course, there may have been several who virtually simultaneously arrived at the same basic ideas, and discussed {in Greek} these ideas among themselves before going back to their home cities.)
- b. That person became interested in Jesus. (I should perhaps add that I assume that that person was a *male*—and have no doubt that this is a correct assumption.)
- c. That person began the process of developing theological ideas involving Jesus while still in Jerusalem.
- d. In returning to his home city, he continued to work on developing theological ideas (involving Jesus). (If he had had contact with other diaspora Jews in Jerusalem with which he had begun some initial discussions, he may have continued to communicate with some of them after he—and these others—had returned to their home cities.)
- e. Once he had developed those ideas to a certain point, he began presenting them in the local synagogue.
- f. A few Jews were attracted to the new ideas, but even more (gentile) God-fearers³¹⁴ were.
- g. At some point those attracted to the new ideas (Jews and gentiles) began to form their own associations. This was done to facilitate their fellowship with like-minded others, and (even more) in response to the fact that they became unwelcome in the synagogues because of their “blasphemous” ideas.
- h. Once this formation of new associations began to occur, more and more gentiles were attracted to them—for two reasons. First, the theology of the new associations drew heavily from the Mystery cults.³¹⁵ Given that most gentiles were members of one or

³¹⁴See, e.g., Charles Guignebert, *The Christ*. A Citadel Press Book. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1968, p. 155. This book was first published (posthumously) in French in 1943. Translated by Peter Ouzts and Phyllis Cooperman; edited and revised by Sonia Volochova. “God-fearers” were gentiles who were attracted to Judaism and synagogue services. What likely prevented male God-fearers from actually converting to Judaism was the requirement that males be circumcised.

³¹⁵For a classic discussion of these “Mysteries” see S. [Samuel] Angus, *The Mystery-Religions*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1975. Unabridged republication of the second (1928) edition; originally

more of those cults, the theology of these new associations would not have seemed strange to them. Second, the *values* associated with these new associations would have been attractive to many gentiles.³¹⁶

- i. By the late second century CE most members of these new fellowships (i.e., “Christians”) were gentiles.³¹⁷ (Note that per Acts 11:26 the label “Christian” was first used, not in Jerusalem, but in Antioch.)

Although the above statements answer the question of why Christianity became a gentile religion, I would like to add an additional point:

- j. The early Christians had little interest in biographical details about Jesus—a fact evidenced by Paul’s letters. Toward the latter part of the first century CE, however, there developed an interest in details regarding Jesus’s life, as indicated by the appearance of Mark’s gospel (to be followed by other written works of a biographical nature). Why such an interest developed is not clear.³¹⁸

So much for a very brief (but accurate, I believe) explanation of how and why Christianity became a religion of gentiles. The explanation itself, however, raises another question: Given that Christianity has its roots in the activity by a certain (unknown) diaspora Jew (whom I have called the Initiator, even though there may have been several), what was it that he learned about Jesus that interested him—and specifically such that he began to think of Jesus as a potential object of (religious) worship?

2. *Jesus as an Object of Worship*

It is a well-known fact that many diaspora Jews, in Jesus’s time, made trips to Jerusalem. Some must have even stayed in Jerusalem for extended periods, for there were synagogues in

published by John Murray in 1925. A recent book of relevance is Marvin W. Meyer, ed., *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. First published by HarperCollins Publishers in 1987. The latter book is particularly valuable because it presents excerpts from ancient texts, along with commentary by Meyer.

³¹⁶See, e.g., Gérard Vallée, *The Shaping of Christianity*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999, p. 16. See also Part III (pp. 312-35) of Chapter 6 (“The Spread of Christianity”) in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

³¹⁷Joseph F. Kelly, *The World of Early Christianity*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997, p. 66.

³¹⁸Walter Bauer has suggested that as expectations of Jesus’s second coming waned over the course of the first century CE, there developed a growing conflict between the various Christian/Jesuan groups. I would argue that during this period there developed interest in biographical details regarding Jesus in response to these declining expectations, and that it was *that* development—because it led to *different* “facts” being asserted about Jesus—which led to this conflict. I assume that this conflict was rather notable by the time Acts was written, but that Acts downplays that conflict.

Jerusalem specifically for diaspora Jews. For example, Acts 6:9 refers to a synagogue of Freedmen in Jerusalem for Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria. Given these facts, it's highly probable that some diaspora Jews were present in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus's death—and learned something about Jesus while present in Jerusalem.

What might a diaspora Jew (our Initiator) have learned about Jesus that would have caused him to be interested in Jesus, and begin developing theological ideas involving Jesus? Let us consider several possibilities.

- a. If he had learned that Jesus was an *apocalyptic prophet* who had predicted God's imminent arrival on earth, he likely would have reacted to Jesus with indifference or skepticism. After all, diaspora Jews were immersed in the Hellenistic milieu, and likely would have regarded such a claim as a parochial one to be expected from Palestine, Galilee in particular. Even if the news that Jesus was (or had been) preaching the imminent arrival of God had sparked their interest in Jesus, there is no reason to believe that that news would have caused our Initiator to regard Jesus as an object of religious worship.
- b. If he had learned that Jesus was a person who had aspired to *liberate* his fellow Palestinians from the Roman occupation, this might have been of some interest to him—for, after all, diaspora Jews were still Jews; but such knowledge would not have resulted in his wanting to make Jesus an object of religious worship. (Of course, there's little evidence that Jesus ever had such a goal—at least if we are thinking of literal liberation, rather than mental deliverance).
- c. If he had learned that Jesus had been a *healer/exorcist*, he likely would not have been particularly impressed—for such people were not uncommon 2000 years ago in that part of the world. Besides, it is impossible to believe that such knowledge would have led him to become interested in making Jesus an object of religious worship. Had he learned that Jesus had been a healer/exorcist, he may have come to regard Jesus as a person with rare (but not unique) powers; but why would *that* cause him to regard Jesus as a potential object of religious worship?
- d. If he had learned that Jesus was a *teacher* (e.g., one not unlike one of the itinerant gentile Cynic teachers with whom he may have had contact “back home”), it's difficult to see why that would have sparked an interest in Jesus on his part. For, after all, there were various teachers representing different philosophical schools near at hand (in his home city), so why be interested in a teacher who had been living in far-off Palestine—even if he was a Jew? And even if the Initiator learned that Jesus had been a teacher, and found Jesus's teaching impressive (e.g., his use of the parable), why would he be thereby led to make that teacher (i.e., Jesus) the object of religious worship?

Why, then, might a diaspora Jew have become interested in Jesus, and in a way that would cause him to regard Jesus as a potential object of worship? The only answer that has any degree of plausibility for me is that the Initiator came to perceive Jesus as a *savior*. Not a (or the)

messiah,³¹⁹ but a *savior* in the sense that that concept was understood in the gentile Mystery cults of the time. As Charles Guignebert has pointed out,³²⁰ a common tenet of the Mysteries was that humans are in need of salvation, but that they are not “on their own” regarding this; for there is a divine being (a “savior”) who has provided an example, and today provides intercession and assistance in the process of becoming “saved.” This divine being had been born (of a “virgin” in most Mysteries), lived, suffered, died, and then been resurrected. “The man [continued Guignebert] who shared in this experience through mystical identification with the god found therein both a model and a surety for his own life.” (Note here that the Mysteries not only had a theology which made reference to a savior; the Mysteries provided their adherents with *experiences* to help them *identify* with that savior.)

But if the Initiator came to perceive Jesus as a savior in a Mystery cult sense, what *caused* him to so perceive Jesus? Here I would argue that this Initiator, being present in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’s death, learned that there had been “appearances” of Jesus after his death. The Initiator may even have heard rumors of Jesus having been “resurrected” (followed by ascension³²¹ shortly thereafter). In either case, the Initiator came to the conclusion that Jesus *had* been resurrected, and that “fact” had great significance for him. *Why*, I will point out in a moment, but before doing so will assert that the *reason* stories began to circulate regarding Jesus’s appearances/resurrection was the discovery of an empty tomb. The only plausible explanation I can think of for those stories is the presence of an empty tomb; and I find it of interest that all four canonical gospels refer to an empty tomb. *Why* the tomb was discovered empty is a question for which I have no answer; however, I don’t think that an answer to that question would have much relevance for the matter of understanding how Christianity developed.

We come, then, to the question of why the Initiator would find significance in the “fact” of Jesus’s resurrection. In addressing this question it is important to keep in mind, first, that the notion of resurrection was a common one with the Mystery cults—and the Initiator likely knew this. (Perhaps the Initiator was from Alexandria: the Mysteries were less mysterious in Alexandria than other cities, because they were practiced more openly there.) Second, one must keep in mind that the Jews (who insisted on maintaining their identity as Jews in the diaspora) were a minority in the diaspora, thus could never feel very comfortable “at home” (i.e., while living in Corinth, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, etc).

But the Initiator was given a brilliant “revelation” to solve that latter problem: *create a Jewish*

³¹⁹See, e.g., John F. A. Sawyer, “Messiah,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 513-14. Bart D. Ehrman has recently stated, relevant to this discussion, that “prior to the Christian proclamation of Jesus, there were no Jews, at least so far as we know, who believed that the Messiah was going to be crucified. On the contrary, the Messiah was to be the great and powerful leader who delivered Israel from its oppressive overlords.” Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, p. 93.

³²⁰Guignebert, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

³²¹The concept of ascension was associated with both the Mysteries and Judaism (e.g., Enoch and Elijah).

Mystery, one based on a *real* person (i.e., Jesus) who had been resurrected—a Mystery, *thereby*, superior to any of the existing Mysteries.³²² The Initiator concluded that if he created a Jewish Mystery, he would be able to “sell” it not only to his fellow diaspora Jews, but to gentiles as well. So that there was the possibility that this Jewish Mystery could become the religion (of choice) of the Empire (perhaps displacing Mithraism³²³). And if *that* occurred, Jews would no longer be made to feel uncomfortable as a minority; they might, in fact, come to occupy an honored place in the Empire. What a fantastic, exciting prospect!

So, the Initiator—now on “cloud nine”—began developing a theology for his Jewish Mystery, one centered on the savior Jesus—a savior with much in common with the Mystery cult saviors. The Initiator's developing theology retained (but in modified form) certain Jewish elements, however; for, after all, his intent was to begin by converting fellow diaspora Jews to his way of thinking. First, he developed the idea of Jesus's death as a sacrifice—a once and for all sacrifice that atoned for “our” (i.e., all of humankind's) sins. A sacrifice that not only made animal sacrifice (practiced in the Jerusalem Temple, but not in the diaspora) no longer necessary, but inappropriate. Second, he borrowed the word “messiah” from Judaism, giving it the Greek name “Christ,” but giving “Christ” a *savior* meaning, rather than a *messiah* one. Third, he added to his theological ideas a set of values representing the best that the Jewish Bible (the Christian “Old Testament”) had to offer (such as expressed in Job 29 and 31),³²⁴ along with the general value, love.

The main point, however, so far as this subsection is concerned, is that the Initiator saw potential in making Jesus an object of worship (as a “savior”) in the context of a Jewish Mystery, and that the development and promulgation of his ideas is the basic reason why Jesus came to be an (if not *the*) object of worship in Christianity (a point that will be further developed in the next subsection).

I hypothesize that the Initiator began developing theological ideas involving Jesus while still in Jerusalem, and very possibly communicated his excitement (and initial thoughts) to other diaspora Jews present in Jerusalem at the time. When he returned to his home city, he continued this developmental work—and such work may have also occurred in other diaspora cities as well. There may even have been communication between different individuals doing the new

³²²Keep in mind that Jews in Alexandria *had already done so*—the Therapeutae! It is of interest that Eusebius [c265 – c339 CE], using a book by Philo of Alexandria as his source, referred (in his “history” of Christianity up to that point) to the Therapeutae as the earliest Christians! See, e.g., “The First Christians?,” pp. 184 – 87 in Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999.

³²³ Mithaism was especially popular in the Roman army; soldiers may have not found the new religion especially appealing, because it was not that “macho” in the beginning.

³²⁴I would argue that even higher values are present in *Deuteronomy*.

theology; but there was enough lack of such communication to enable the development of different versions of the new theology in different cities. At any rate, *that* would help us account for the diversity in theological ideas that arose in different parts of the Empire during the first century CE.

Once the Initiator (and others with similar intentions) had developed his ideas “sufficiently,” he communicated them to fellow synagogue members. Insofar as this was done during synagogue meetings, God-fearers learned about the new ideas; and they are more likely to have found these ideas attractive than Jews (because they were more likely to have had contact with the Mystery cults). I suspect that the Initiator was able to convert some of his fellow Jews to the new theology, but even more God-fearers. The introduction of these new ideas into the synagogue was, however, a disturbing element, and most synagogue members would have resisted the ideas. Not only resisted, but acted to oust those who promulgated them from the synagogue. Thus, the Initiator and his God-fearer followers were forced to create their own associations. But, on the other hand, this gave them an opportunity to interact with like-minded others, and develop their new religion—Christianity—as they thought it should be developed.

These early associations were probably primarily gentile in composition, but Jews likely provided most of the initial leadership. Because, however, few new Jewish converts were gained—but new gentile ones were—once the initial Jewish leadership died off, the associations became almost entirely gentile in composition. And the Christianity associated with these associations had much in common with the Mystery cults in that the orientation was to a *savior* (i.e., Jesus), who was worshiped as such. The initial leaders of the Christian movement do not, however, seem to have made much progress; and it wasn’t until Paul learned of the movement, became “converted,” and then began his missionizing efforts that the movement began to “take off.” The claim that Christianity’s growth was of an exponential nature should not, however, be accepted, for some scholars believe that even by 250 CE only 2% of the Roman Empire was Christian—there being many different Christian sects in existence then at that.

I noted earlier in this section that the gentile Mysteries not only had a *theology* centered on a savior, but provided their adherents *experiences* to help them identify with that savior. And that, in fact, this experiential aspect of the Mysteries was an extremely important feature of them. Was early Christianity similar to the gentile Mysteries in this regard? To a degree, at any rate, it seems. It appears that the experience of *Spirit-filling*³²⁵ was prized and promoted by these early Christians. It’s even possible that techniques were developed and taught to bring about a Spirit-filled state in adherents; but if so, we have no knowledge of them.

What were the consequences of Spirit-filling? Paul referred to Spirit-filling as changing one’s consciousness/personality—and thereby behavior, enabling one to follow the Law as a matter of course (Galatians 5:22-23). In the gospel of John, however, the Helper (John’s name for the Holy Spirit) reveals the truth about God (15:26), leads a person into the truth (16:13): what Spirit-filling did for the person was more ambiguous (although ostensibly the author of John

³²⁵For an excellent discussion of relevance here see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

perceived the Spirit as a source of ideas/knowledge). Thus, it appears that insofar as Spirit-filling was recognized as a phenomenon by early Christians, and was sought/prized, there was a lack of agreement so far as *consequences* were concerned.

3. *From Religion of Jesus to Religion About Jesus*

In a sense, the question of how and why the religion *of* Jesus became, with Christianity, a religion *about* Jesus has already been answered, but there is a little more to be said—and I will do so in this subsection. Let me begin with the observation that the discussion in the first subsection may seem to suggest that there was but one strand of Christianity during the first century CE. In the second subsection I suggested the possibility of different strands of Christianity developing in different parts of the Empire (the development occurring by different diaspora Jews), but the question of diversity during the first century CE needs further attention. Let me begin by noting that Burton L. Mack has observed that “For the first forty years [after Jesus's death] we are able to identify at least seven different streams within the Jesus movement, though there may have been many more.”³²⁶

I have already argued that the seven Jesus movement groups identified by Mack can be divided into Jesuan groups (the first six) and a Christ cult/Christian group. Here is why this grouping is of significance: Jesuans can be thought of as continuing the religion *of* Jesus (each strand in its own way); Christians, however, developed a religion *about* Jesus. The Jesuan groups all were lineal descendants of the Original Group that surrounded Jesus during his life; the Christian groups had their origins in efforts by diaspora Jews (in my theory). The Jesuan groups consisted primarily of Palestinian Jews; the Christian groups consisted of diaspora Jews and gentiles.

It seems reasonable to believe that there was conflict between Jesuans and Christians, given that the orientation of Jesuans was to *orthopraxy*, and that of Christians was to *orthodoxy*. Thus, there is reason to question much of the contents of Acts from the standpoint of historical accuracy: Peter's alleged vision in Acts 11, the views attributed to Peter and James (Jesus's brother) in Acts 15, the discussion of Paul's trip to Jerusalem in Acts 21, etc. I also suspect that Paul's account (in Galatians 2) of his trip to Jerusalem has been “doctored,” so as to minimize the actual conflict that existed between Christians and members of Jesus movements connected genetically with Jesus's ministry (i.e., Jesuans).

The traditional view regarding Christianity's development has been that Catholic Christianity has its roots in the apostolic group, and that other groups that developed were “heretical.”³²⁷ This

³²⁶Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, p. 44.

³²⁷Bart D. Ehrman, in his *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, notes (pp. 7-9) that the conventional view was first given its most important challenge by Walter Bauer [1877-1960] in 1934. For a recent discussion of “heresies” see Gerd Lüdemann, *op. cit.* Ehrman notes (p. xii) that by the fourth century CE one particular Christian group had co-opted for itself (because it had the power to do so) the designation “orthodox” (straight thinking), and marginalized all other groups as “heretical.” Eusebius gave intellectual support to this group, arguing that the belief system of this group was traceable to Jesus's disciples and their followers, “heretics” being people who fell away from the truth. From today's

view is no longer accepted by most scholars, but what scholars have failed to do is make clear how Christianity *did* begin—the most important fact here being that Christianity is *not*, it would seem, a lineal descendant of the Original Group. The other important fact is that the groups that *were* lineal descendants were declared “heretical” (!) by the Orthodox party which emerged to power—which party persecuted not only Jesusans, but Christians who were not “orthodox.” Which is not to say that “orthodox” has (had) some fixed meaning; for in fact it was given a *shifting* meaning—so that at any given moment one could never be sure if one was being placed in the “orthodox” camp or a “heretical” one by those with the power to do so!

4. *Why Did Christianity Become a World Religion?*

Above I have indicated the *necessary* reasons for Christianity emerging as a world religion, but not the *sufficient* ones. The question that now remains is: Why did Christianity, once it got started, grow to become a world religion?

As I argued above, it was diaspora Jews who started Christianity. Their original intent was to convert fellow Jews; ironically, however, their efforts led to the establishment of a religion dominated by gentiles. It is also ironic that Jesus’s contemporary, Philo of Alexandria (who evidently had no knowledge of Jesus), tried to re-frame Judaism in light of Greek philosophy; but that rather than being successful in converting his fellow Jews to his way of thinking, he had (unintentionally) a strong influence on the early Church Fathers. To the extent, in fact, that some Christians (e.g., Eusebius—as I noted earlier) insisted on labeling him as a fellow Christian!

If diaspora Jews provided the initial “push” relative to Christianity, it was especially gentiles who became attracted to the new religion. Some gentiles may have been attracted to the emerging Christianity because of its theology, but more likely gentiles were attracted to it because of the *values* associated with Christianity—during the first few decades, at any rate. For whereas the pagan mysteries were individualistic at least in the sense of being oriented to controlling the desires of the flesh,³²⁸ Christianity linked an ethical code with religious faith. This gave Christianity (as it was during the first few decades, at least) an attractiveness for many that the pagan mystery cults could not match.

But even this was not enough to cause Christianity to develop into an important religion numerically. Contrary to popular opinion, there was no mushrooming growth of Christianity during the first two centuries of its existence. Indeed, as late as 250 CE only 2% of the Roman Empire’s population was Christian;³²⁹—and Christians then were a diverse group besides. Had

perspective it turns out that people like Eusebius were the true heretics! For given that it is reasonably clear that Jesus’s ministry was oriented to *orthopraxy* rather than *orthodoxy*, *orthodoxy* is *inherently* heretical!

³²⁸Roman Catholicism retained this feature of the Mysteries, for “religious” have been thought of especially as people able to control their fleshly desires, with “lay” persons only needing to do so during Lent. Recent priestly scandals involving sexual abuse by priests destroy this belief, of course.

³²⁹Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987, p. 317. This 2%

the Emperor Constantine—an alleged convert to Christianity³³⁰—not promoted the religion in the early 300s, and the Emperor Theodosius not made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380 CE, it seems unlikely that Christianity would have emerged as a world religion. It's even possible that Christianity would have become extinct before, say, 500 CE!

Conclusions

I will conclude, first, by commenting briefly on each of the statements constituting the epigraph.

1. Christianity is a “paganized” version of Judaism—or, better, paganism with a thin Jewish veneer.

This statement suggests that Christianity is related to Judaism, but is a perverted version of that religion: a version of Judaism onto which substantial elements of paganism were grafted in its early development. So many pagan elements, in fact, that it should be considered to be a “denomination” of paganism rather than a variety of Judaism.

It is obvious that Christianity has many pagan characteristics (borrowed from the Mysteries). But can Christianity be thought of as having begun as a variety of Judaism? It is in addressing a question such as this that the distinction made by Mack—six Jesus movements that I call Jesuan vs. one Jesus movement that was a Christ cult—is useful. For in his view Christianity did not develop directly out of Judaism; rather, it developed out of a Thomas group (which had developed out of Judaism, specifically the ministry of Jesus). And I would go beyond this in arguing that Christianity was initiated by diaspora Jews who were ethnically Jews, but strongly influenced by the Mysteries; and that in creating Christianity, they were trying to create a Jewish Mystery. (One implication being that they had no interest in having the Hebrew Bible as the Scripture for their new religion, the decision to include the “Old” Testament having come later, largely in response to Marcionism.)

2. (Orthodox) Christianity is, by its very nature, heretical.

It is a truism that Christianity is (and has long been) oriented to orthodoxy (i.e., correct belief), whereas the six original Jesus movements (constituting what I term “Jesuanism”) were not—being, rather, oriented to *orthopraxy*, i.e., correct practice / behavior. That the early Jesus movements were all primarily about a *way of life*,³³¹ seems relatively clear; although it also

figure may, in fact, include not just “Christians” (i.e., the seventh group identified by Burton L. Mack, as referred to at the beginning of this essay), but members of the first six groups as well (i.e., Jesus groups with genetic roots in the group that surrounded Jesus while he was alive).

³³⁰ “Constantine wanted ‘one God, one religion’ to consolidate his claim of ‘one Empire, one Emperor.’ He oversaw the creation of the Nicene creed . . . and Christians who refused to assent this creed were banished from the Empire or otherwise silenced. This ‘Christian’ Emperor then returned home from Nicaea and had his wife suffocated and his son murdered.” [!] Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

³³¹ At various places in Acts the followers of Jesus (immediately after his death) are referred to as

seems clear that each of the “Jesuan” strands thought of “proper way of life” (or lifestyle) differently. The fact that early Jesuanism was “about” a way of life might be interpreted as meaning that they were not religions (as that term is understood today³³²). The fact that for centuries Christianity has been a “mere” religion, specifically one oriented to creedal recitation, ritualistic behavior—and the celebration of Jesus’s birth (Christmas), death (Good Friday), and resurrection (Easter)—means that Christianity has had little in common with the early Jesuan strands. I might add that these celebrations associated with Christianity constitute a mockery of Jesus’s life, not in the sense that they overtly mock Jesus, but in the sense that they divert attention from what is truly significant about Jesus’s life—*his ministry*. As if there would—or could—be any celebration of Jesus’s *birth* had there not been a *ministry* by Jesus! Given that orthodox Christianity has a focus on belief, whereas the early Jesus movements had an orientation to a “Way” (of life), one can argue that orthodox Christianity, in its various manifestations, is inherently heretical.

3. *The religion of Jesus became, with Christianity, a religion about Jesus—about, indeed, Jesus given the name “Christ.”*

This statement suggests that Christianity has not continued (and refined) the religion of Jesus; rather, it has *abandoned* Jesus’s religion (which was a way of life) and has substituted for that religion a set of dogmas about Jesus (and God) to which one must give assent to qualify for the label “Christian.” There is also the suggestion that Christianity is lineally descended from the group surrounding Jesus; that it began as a religion which carried forth the ministry of Jesus, but gradually came to put that in the background at the expense of worshiping Jesus. Although Mack would agree with this latter statement (seeing Christianity as having emerged from a Thomas group), I believe that a more plausible view is one that asserts that Christianity developed *independently* of any Jesuan groups; that, rather, Christianity was created by diaspora Jews who had not been a part of any Jesuan groups.

4. *Christianity conquered the world, and in the process the world conquered Christianity.*

Christianity conquered the world in the sense that it was made the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 CE, so that people were forced to become its adherents. The statement here is seemingly emphasizing the “fact” that the value system associated with Christianity changed over time. I agree. Specifically, I would argue that when Christianity was young, the value system associated with it was not very different from that associated with any of the Jesuan groups. (Where the differences lay was in theology, I would argue.) However, the fact that Christianity started as a religion having an orientation to correct belief meant that the “countercultural” value system associated with it initially could be “swamped” by the belief

followers of the Way (or Way of the Lord). The first such reference occurs at Acts 9:2.

³³²We are used to thinking of society in reductionistic terms, with a society consisting of a series of parts, religion being one. The ancients tended to think in more wholistic terms in that they did not think of religion as a separate realm. In addition, for the ancients (and, indeed, until just a few centuries ago) religion was experientially oriented (rather than intellectually oriented, as with us).

component. And as that occurred, it was easy for the original countercultural value system to give way to a “worldly” one. The original value system might continue to be given lip service (on Sundays), but congregants were not expected to take that value system seriously after a certain point in history; rather, they were expected to accept and live by the “world’s” values during the week. Thus, it can be said that the world conquered Christianity during the period that Christianity emerged to dominance in the West. And it can be added that one who makes this claim typically is not just making an historical claim; s/he is tacitly asserting that s/he assents to the values that s/he attributes to Jesus.

5. *“What do you think of Christianity?” “I think it's a good idea. Too bad it has never been tried.”*

No, I *don't* think that Christianity is a good idea! It is a religion with but a tenuous connection with the ministry of Jesus, a religion with many pagan elements (borrowed from the Mysteries). This is not to say that I am rejecting Jesus, however. Yes, I reject the notion that he was a divine being. But I value the gospels that were written, giving “biographies” of his life. There is much more that I could say about this matter—and I do so in my other essays on this web site.

Fitness and Religion: The Case of the Mysteries and Christianity

James B. Gray

As changes have occurred in our economy, those changes have stimulated changes in other realms of our society—e.g., the educational system, the legal system, and even the religious system (as witness the rise of independent “megachurches” during the past few decades). These latter changes have not, however, occurred *instantaneously* in response to changes in the economy. Rather, changes in these other realms have tended to lag behind changes in the economy, with variations between realms in the length of lag and completeness of adaptation.

Whereas the economy, throughout United States history, has occupied the leadership role in bringing about societal system change, it’s possible that some of the non-economy sector change has been “pre-adaptive” in that its beginnings trace to a period before it was fully adaptive—so that it “anticipated” developments that would be occurring in the economy. Conceivably, in fact, some of this pre-adaptive development has played a vanguard role in *shaping* developments in the economy. Offhand, I can’t think of examples to illustrate these last two points. Indeed, perhaps my last point above is best thought of as a (hoped for) “self-fulfilling prophecy” in the sense that in my [“Worship”](#) I advocate the creation of New Word Fellowships, in part as institutional agents of societal system change.

In noting that as changes in our economy occur, that change tends to precipitate changes in other portions of the society, I am saying in effect that the biological concept of “fitness” has relevance in the human realm. I must make clear at the outset, however, that I am *not* here using “fitness” in a Darwinian sense: the “fit” in Darwin’s theory of natural selection³³³ are those individuals whose innate attributes enable them to win (and thereby survive, and perhaps later produce progeny) in competition with conspecifics for sustenance (this competition precipitated by “excess births”). Rather, I am referring to the fact that the components of a given societal system can be thought of as *fitting together*—as if they were pieces of a puzzle. This “fitting together” does not necessarily involve interacting as equals; indeed, typically, within a societal system, one component/sector plays a lead role, with the other components playing “second fiddle” to that dominant sector. The point, however, is that although most of the components of a societal system are playing second fiddle, they are not therefore playing “off key”—put another way, they are not putting sand into the societal system’s gears.

My reason for bringing up the matter of fitness in the sense specified above is that I wish to use that concept in discussing Christianity. My focus here will be especially on Christianity in its formative years; and given that I conceive Christianity as having started as a sort of pagan Mystery with a thin Jewish veneer, my logical starting point is a discussion of the Mysteries. Section A below summarizes the developmental model, relative to the Mysteries, developed by Samuel Angus in his classic book on the Mysteries. Section B then discusses the Mysteries proper, with Section C then focusing on the first stage in Angus’s model. Within both sections

333 Beginning with the fifth edition of his *The Origin of Species*, Darwin used the phrase “survival of the fittest”—a phrase he borrowed (with credit) from his contemporary Herbert Spencer.

attention is given to the question of how developments, over time, in the Mysteries can be interpreted from a fitness perspective. Section D then relates Christianity to the Mysteries, with the brief Section E, finally, addressing the questions: (1) Does Christianity, as it manifests itself in contemporary United States, fit the society?; and (2) Is Christianity fit to continue as our dominant religion? Note that the “fit” in the second question is given a meaning different from the “fit” in the first question! This is intentional!

Perhaps I should note at the outset that my view of Christianity’s origins is in conflict with that of noted scholar (now retired) Burton L. Mack.³³⁴ Mack argues that of the Jesus movements that developed after Jesus’s departure, a “Christ cult” was not among them. Rather, the first “Christ cult” developed in northern Syria, and somehow emerged from an existing Jesus group present there (evidently one centered on the gospel of Thomas). I agree with Mack that Christianity was not among the first Jesus groups, but disagree in that my position is that the first “Christ cult” developed *independently* of any Jesus group.³³⁵ This is, however, not the place to elaborate on this point. Suffice it to say that I find it most plausible to believe that Christianity has its origins in efforts by diaspora Jews associated with a Jewish Mystery—the Therapeutae of Alexandria being the best possibility. I would add only that my view is that whereas Philo of Alexandria’s intent was to “paganize” Judaism, the intent of Christianity’s founder(s) was, rather, to create a “Judaized” Mystery.

The present essay uses as its starting point, then, the assumption that Christianity began its “career” as a sort of Mystery religion, one which may never have been associated with a Jesus movement. It discusses Christianity in the context of Samuel Angus’s developmental model regarding the Mysteries, a model which identifies four stages—only stages 1, 3, and 4 having specific relevance for a discussion of Christianity, however. In discussing a given stage my focus is on the role of religion in the host society—the nature of the religion’s “fit” to the society. I then discuss Christianity’s beginnings in the light of the prior discussion of the Mysteries, and conclude with some salient comments on religion in the contemporary world.

The Angus Developmental Model

Charles Guignebert³³⁶ has noted that many of the gods of the Mysteries were imported to the Mediterranean area from elsewhere: Isis, Osiris, and Serapis from Egypt; Adonis-Tammuz, Atargatis, and the Baalim from Syria; Cybele, Attis, and Sabazius from Phrygia; Mithra and Istar

334 Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.

335 The distinction that I make between “Jesus group” and “Christ group” is that the orientation of the first type of group is to *behavior*, that of the latter to *belief*. This distinction is broad enough to allow considerable diversity within each group—which there was in reality.

336 Charles Guignebert, *The Christ*. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1968 (copyright held by University Books, Inc.), p. 181. Translated by Peter Ouzts and Phyllis Cooperman; edited and revised by Sonia Volochova. Originally published (in French, and posthumously) in 1943.

(as well as astrology) from Iran and Mesopotamia; etc. Samuel Angus uses this fact to identify³³⁷ four stages in the historical development of the Mysteries, the first two being pre-Mystery stages during which the gods had not yet been exported.

During the *first* stage the gods were gods of a whole people. Within a given society a “theology” existed in the form of stories about the society’s god(s), but this was not thought of as a dogma that people were required to “believe in.” Rather, they were simply stories that reflected, in personified form, the way of life of the people—and which thereby likely enriched the lives of the people (in that they stimulated the imagination). Rites and ceremonies involving the gods existed, but everyone participated in them: initiation ceremonies, with their “secrets,” had not yet been invented.

The *second* stage identified by Angus is one occurring after the conquest of the society, during which the indigenous religion continued (with modifications in response to the conquest), but only as the religion of the “lower stratum”: it was no longer the religion of the whole society. Presumably the religion continued with “lowers” because they were the least impacted by the conquest, thus would be expected to continue their religion, insofar as this was possible (and, quite possibly, with modifications).

The *third* stage is that of the Mystery religions proper. During this stage people who had been displaced geographically by conquest took their gods (and the stories involving them) with them to their new place of residence. Those “worshiping” a given god (e.g., Adonis) in a foreign land likely formed a minority in their new area of residence, and compensated for this status by forming private associations, and meeting on a regular basis. Although their gods had migrated with them, the people began to interpret the stories associated with those gods in a new way—as paralleling *their own* lives from a life-cycle standpoint. The character of “worship” also changed in that now the emphasis was on personal “salvation” (a topic that will be commented on shortly), with the gods now being thought of as *saviors*. Angus adds (p. 44): “During this period they [the Mysteries] attracted, on the whole, the lower orders and the foreign population.”

During the *fourth* and final stage Mystery religions ceased being private religions with secret rites, and became State religions. The initial phase of this stage was the dedication, by the emperor Caligula, of a temple to Isis Camponis, followed by elevation of Mysteries to State religions by the Syrian emperors. Still later, Constantine became a “convert” to Christianity, and promoted that religion. Then, in 380 CE Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. So that although Christianity began as a Mystery religion associated with private “clubs,” it “evolved” into a State religion (and in the process changed somewhat in character, of course). It is of interest that Angus argues (p. 161) that the Roman government had always had the policy of controlling the religion of the masses or, that failing that, controlling the masses via religion. (!) One suspects that Constantine had this in mind when

³³⁷ S. [amuel] Angus, *The Mystery-Religions: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1975, p. 44. Originally published by John Murray (London) as *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity*, 1925.

he “converted” to Christianity and began to favor Christianity; and that after the Empire ended, the popes continued the Roman Empire under the guise of religion.

In discussing the four stages it will be useful to begin with stage three (the Mysteries proper), to then proceed to stage one, and to conclude with stage four (omitting stage two as lacking in relevance for the discussion).

The Mysteries Proper

The Greek word (*mysterion*) upon which our “mystery” is based derives from the Greek verb *myein*, meaning “to close” (specifically, the lips or eyes).³³⁸ The “closing” associated with the Mystery religions involved both the lips and eyes, and was both literal and metaphorical. For example, during initiation the initiate often was required to close the eyes, symbolizing the darkness associated with ordinary existence; in addition, initiation ceremonies commonly occurred at night, to reinforce this point. At the climax of the ceremony, however, the initiate’s eyes were opened both literally and figuratively, for the purpose of the ceremony was enlightenment in a broad sense. The enlightenment involved, on the one hand, the learning of a secret(s) communicated by a priest—which secret(s) one was expected to keep (“seal the lips”) throughout one’s life. It also, though, involved (in intent, at any rate) achievement of what today we would term a “natural high,” so that one would “see” things differently—would, indeed, *be* a different person—while the “high” lasted, at any rate.

Thus, although the term “Mystery” may suggest that the Mystery religions were primarily about secret *knowledge* in the sense of featuring ceremonies during which secret truths were imparted by priests, the fact of the matter is that the thrust of the Mysteries was *experiential*. These religions aimed to give their adherents experiences which would cause them to become “born again,” i.e., to achieve an altered state of consciousness which would involve a temporary change in personality, and a permanent change in the initiate’s perceptions. The “high” (i.e., state of ecstasy) acquired during the initiation ceremony presumably would “wear off” rather quickly after the ceremony was completed; upon “seeing the light” near the conclusion of the ceremony, however, one’s perceptions would be permanently affected—one would “see” things differently thereafter, one’s understanding of Reality would be permanently changed. This because one had received certain “truths” while in an altered state of consciousness.

Learning was, then, associated with initiation ceremonies, but it was a sort of learning that resulted from certain pre-planned *experiences* rather than from, e.g., reading a book; put another way, it was learning of a *gnostic* sort. Of course, the fact that initiands were sworn to secrecy concerning the specifics of initiation ceremonies means that we know less about those ceremonies than we do about other aspects of the Mysteries. Evidently, the limited knowledge

³³⁸ Marvin W. Meyer, editor, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook. Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. 4. Originally published by HarperCollins Publishers in 1987.

that we *do* have regarding these ceremonies comes from Christian converts who “felt no hesitation about betraying the mysteries”³³⁹

The Mysteries existed in the Mediterranean Basin/Near East area for a lengthy period of time—from, roughly, the 6th century BCE until the 5th century CE (p. 41)—but were not always welcomed by the State. During the period of the Roman Republic (218 - 31 BCE), in fact, the Mysteries were suppressed, as was also the case during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (p. 38). Ironically, in 150 CE the Roman Senate granted a right for burial societies to exist, and many clubs/fellowships then formed under the pretext of being burial societies (p. 198). So that many associations after that time that claimed for themselves the status of burial societies were, in fact, only secondarily such. All private associations during the heyday of the Mysteries were religious to some degree, but not all of them could be considered to be *Mystery societies*; not all featured the ceremonies (with associated ideas) that would qualify them as Mysteries.

I should add that a difficulty that has faced scholars in studying the Mysteries is that any given group changed over time, and the different Mysteries influenced one another (i.e., borrowed from one another) in the process of development (p. 20). (Scholars use the term “syncretism” to refer to the latter phenomenon.) Given that toleration characterized the Mysteries, and that in consequence one could be associated with *several* Mystery groups, this fact of multiple membership may explain why the different Mysteries came to resemble each other fairly closely. Not that there weren't important differences between the Mysteries; but the similarities were more important, and became more so over time.

The stories (“theology”) associated with a given Mystery are of interest because they typically featured gods born under unusual circumstances (e.g., virginally conceived, as with Adonis).³⁴⁰ Gods who then lived a life filled with suffering, who died (via execution at times), and then were resurrected. The Mysteries celebrated these events in the god's life, especially his resurrection. For example, every year in Antioch (wherein the term “Christian” first came into usage, per Acts) the death and resurrection of Adonis were celebrated. The adherents of this cult believed that Adonis had suffered a cruel death; and that Adonis had then descended into Hell, followed by his resurrection and ascent into Heaven. What needs to be emphasized regarding the Mysteries, however, is that such “facts” were not articles of belief. The (p. 161) “Mysteries, with the exception of the Hermetic theology and Orphism, were never conspicuously doctrinal or dogmatic” And they followed the pattern of the State religions in that they were not oriented to morality.³⁴¹

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ The Mithra of Mithraism was said to have been born from a rock (!), and his worship was always conducted in a cave. Is this the origin of the belief common with early Christians that Jesus was born in a cave? Does the phrase “rock of my salvation” harken back to Mithraism?

³⁴¹ Angus states (p. 11): “It was not from their cults, but from their philosophy that moral ideals came to the Greeks.”

The function of the god of a given Mystery was to bring *salvation* to the individual, and this had three aspects. First, the birth of the Mysteries coincided with a growing consciousness of sin, this concept having entered Greece with the Orphic movement of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE (p. 151). The Mysteries aimed to relieve adherents from this burden. Second, resettling had resulted in rootlessness, thus many people living in anxiety, an anxiety compounded (p. 51) by widespread fears of coming under the influence of sorcerers. The Mysteries strove to reduce this anxiety; it appears, indeed, that the Mysteries were rather successful in making (p. 73) “men comfortable in the universe.”³⁴² Third, the development of the Mysteries was coincident with a growing fear of death; the Mysteries addressed this fear by providing assurance of a blessed afterlife for adherents.

These various goals were especially accomplished via ceremonies, especially initiation ceremonies. Membership in a given Mystery association involved progression to different levels of spirituality (somewhat analogous to levels within Masonic orders), there being an initiation ceremony associated with each stage in the process. Thus, the member of a given Mystery group was not only involved in various seasonal celebrations, but in frequent initiation ceremonies—either as an initiand, or as one helping conduct the ceremony. Initiation ceremonies in particular had the purpose (p. 136) of helping the initiand encounter the group’s patron god (experienced as dazzling light), this meeting occurring in Heaven. Thus, the person who met the patron god during initiation ceremony thought of himself as ascending to Heaven, just as the god had. The intent of the initiation ceremony, then, was not only to have the initiand feel a sense of oneness with the god—to, in fact become “possessed” by the god—but to travel to Heaven for his meeting with the god.

Today we would say that initiation ceremonies had the intent of bringing about an altered state of consciousness in the initiand, using various means to do so. The ceremony would re-enact the god’s life, and during the ceremony the initiand was expected to become *emotionally involved* with the events in the god’s life—the god’s suffering and, especially, resurrection. For the goal here was (p. 96) to bring about the “death” of one’s own “old self,” and become “born again” as a new creature: just as the god had become resurrected, so did the initiand hope to become born anew. (Indeed, with some Mysteries one was served milk after the ceremony to symbolize the “fact” that one had just been born.) While in an ecstatic state, the Mystery’s “secret” (or secrets) would be conveyed to the initiand (a secret, or secrets, appropriate to the stage of initiation), so that the initiation experience was a *learning* experience as well as an emotional one. I should add that (p. 96) ceremonies were commonly held at midnight to emphasize the contrast between darkness and light, the “old man” and one’s new state of being. And I should also add that although an ecstatic experience was sought during initiation ceremonies, this ideal was not always realized. For example, (p. 103) Porphyry confessed that he had had such an experience only once, and that was when he was 68!

³⁴²One could add that the Mysteries, by enabling people to have fellowship with like-minded others, helped people cope.

As Angus states (p. 93), with initiation the “appeal was to the eye, the imagination and the emotions rather than to the intellect, the main purpose being to induce the “initiation through the substitution of personality (by hallucination, hypnotism, or suggestion) to *experience* his identification with deity.” And (pp. 100-01): “The *mystes* [i.e., the initiand into a Mystery] were brought [during the process of initiation] into a mystic ineffable condition in which the normal functions of personality were in abeyance and the moral strivings which form character virtually ceased or were relaxed, while the emotional and intuitive were accentuated. These states were Ecstasy . . . and Enthusiasm . . ., both of which might be induced by vigil and fasting, tense religious expectancy, whirling dances, physical stimuli, the contemplation of the sacred objects, the effect of stirring music, inhalation of fumes, revivalistic contagion (such as happened in the Church at Corinth [referred to by Paul in his letter]), hallucination, suggestion, and all the other means belonging to the apparatus of the Mysteries.” I should add that whereas in the Mysteries becoming “born again” did not necessarily have implications for one as a moral being, what Paul emphasized with “Spirit-filling” was that the Spirit-filled person would follow the Law, virtually as a matter of course.

Guignebert has noted³⁴³ that “the initiation at Eleusis took no heed of the age, sex, social condition, or way of life of the *mystoi*.” And it may have been generally true that Mystery fellowships were diverse in membership, perhaps more diverse than other fellowships. Angus notes, however, that not all who desired to be admitted into a given Mystery association were: (p. 80) “Homicides were particularly precluded.” Thus, morality played a role with the Mysteries at least in the sense that it might affect admission practices.

Those admitted into a Mystery group likely needed to confess their sins (p. 80). Baptisms were usually required, apparently (p. 81), the most unusual being the *taurobolium*, a bath in bull’s blood associated with the Cybele-Attis cult and Mithraism (p. 94).³⁴⁴ This latter rite was especially noxious to some of the early Christians, who viewed it as a travesty of Jesus’s death on Calvary. Although the killing of a bull (the *taurobolium*) was not necessarily regarded as a sacrifice (whereas Jesus’s death *did* come to be so viewed), sacrifices were associated with some Mystery cults. For example, (p. 83) “The Eleusian ritual required the sacrifice of a young pig after the bathing in the sea.”

Of other rites practiced by the Mysteries, that of communion deserves especial notice. With Mithraism, for example, adherents would share a sacrament of bread, and water mixed with wine. Angus (p. 123): “In such a communion service the Mithraist believers were strengthened in their faith that Mithra would assure them victory here, and would come again from heaven to bring forth the dead from their graves for a judgment at which their Mediator would be the Advocate of the initiated soul, which, purified through his rites, would ascend through the seven planetary spheres to Paradise.” Some early Christians, of course, considered this a travesty of

³⁴³*Op. cit.*, p. 151.

³⁴⁴Mithraism was more “macho” than were most Mysteries; thus, it is not surprising that many Roman soldiers became attracted to the cult. See David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

the Lord's Supper—evidently being unable to face the fact that Mithraism was an older religion than was Christianity.

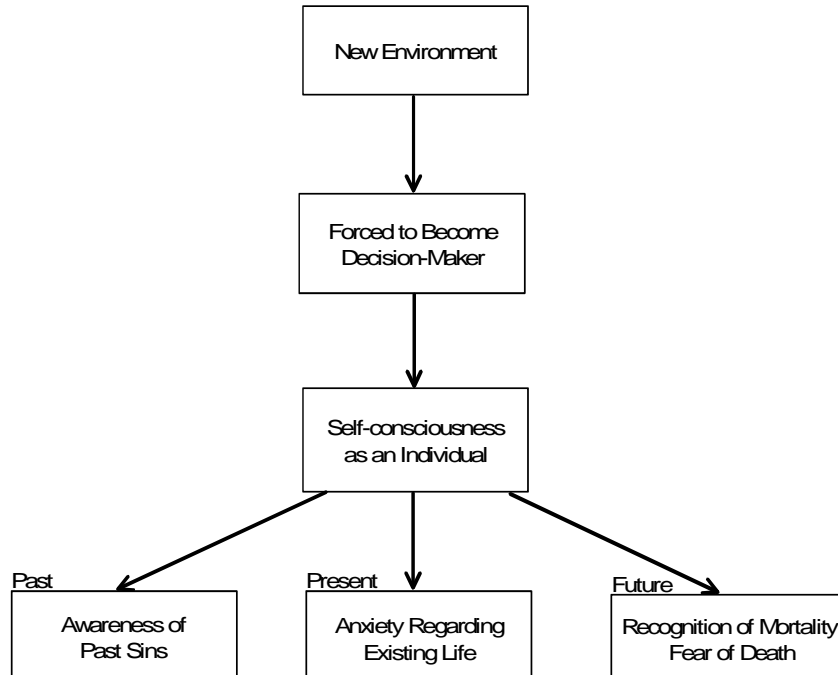
Why did the Mystery religions develop? Angus notes that Orphism—which had first appeared in Greece during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE (p. 150) “appeared at a time of great social upheaval when the very foundations of life seemed to be tottering.” He also notes that during and after the time of Alexander “the Great” (356 - 323 BCE) conditions were created that conduced the emergence of the Mysteries:

- Alexander (p. 16) “broke down national barriers and set the nations free for international relationships.”
- He (p. 16) “was the inaugurator of the comprehensive cosmopolitanism which reached its apogee in the Roman Empire.” A cosmopolitanisms which had tolerance as a major component.
- He had (p. 17) a “deliberate policy of intermixing diverse populations” For example, (p. 24) he settled many Jews in Alexandria.
- He promoted (p. 17) the use of common Greek throughout the area of his conquest.

I would single out as the most important factor the fact that so many people became uprooted, displaced during this period—and especially during and after the time of Alexander. The figure below (next page) summarizes the explanation I would offer for the development and growth of the Mysteries:

One of my basic assumptions here is that during the stage one (of four) identified by Angus (and discussed at the beginning of the previous subsection) people's minds were absorbed in the society (and the “surround”³⁴⁵). This meant, first, that people were not particularly self-conscious; and meant, second, that insofar as people thought of time, they thought of it in cyclic terms—specifically thinking of an annual cycle. But in thinking of time in terms of an annual cycle, people applied this thought not to their own individual lives but, rather, to the agricultural activity they engaged in (with its annual sprouting, growing, harvesting, and dying), and the societal ceremonies they engaged in related to their agricultural way of life.

345 An implication of this fact of “absorption” is that they acquired an “adaptational” mentality—which can be contrasted with the *control* mentality that seemed to develop while the Agricultural Revolution was in “progress.” This latter mentality has manifested itself in three ways: (1) control of the “environment,” (2) control over others (resulting in class/caste systems), and (3) control over oneself (to the extent that one's body, and its natural functions, become separated/alienated from one's mind).



I assume that when a person became displaced—torn from the fabric of his/her society—s/he became more conscious of himself/herself as a separate being, a being which had a past, present, and future. Thus, although before s/he had thought of time in *cyclic* terms and had not applied this concept to his/her own life, s/he now began to think of time as *linear*. Initially, s/he applied this concept of time to his/her own life, but over time began to think of time *per se* as linear—i.e., began to *generalize* the concept of time as linear.

Although during this period some people acquired new environments as a matter of *choice* (e.g., the Jewish diaspora), most did by *force* (including some Jews, as I noted earlier). In either case, however, if one is placed in a new setting, one is forced to become a decision-maker. (If one is solidly embedded in one's society—as one is during stage one—most of one's actions are given to one by one's *society*; they are not a matter of choice.) If one becomes a decision-maker, one necessarily becomes conscious of oneself as a separate individual, this conduces one to begin thinking of time (as it relates to one's own life, at any rate) as linear, and *that* has three implications of relevance:

- One becomes more aware of the “fact” that one's behaviors have been self-chosen (to a degree at least); once one begins to think this way, the thought occurs to one that some of one's past decisions were “wrong.” The thought occurs to one that one regrets some of the behaviors that one had engaged in: one develops the sense that one has “sinned.”
- Because one faces challenges in coping in the present, one becomes anxious; and a fear that one might come under the control of a sorcerer adds to one's feeling of anxiety.

- One becomes aware of the fact that one is mortal, and thus acquires anxiety about the prospect of death.

In other words, I would argue that psycho-social needs arose during this period which the State and its religions were unable to address. Given that the Mysteries *did* address these needs, and that no other institutions arose to compete with the Mysteries, the Mysteries became a prominent feature of this period—even though the State was often suspicious of them. And I might add that because during most of the imperial period the Mysteries were *not* suppressed by the State, and the Mysteries themselves practiced toleration, Christianity was able to develop during this period without facing much opposition/persecution.

Having now identified general characteristics of the Mysteries, and addressed the matter of *why* the Mysteries arose and developed to prominence, the question arises: What was the nature of the “fit” between these religions and their host societies? From what I have written in this subsection so far, it would appear that the answer is simple: The Mysteries arose to address psycho-social needs that developed during this period; it follows, then, that they fit their host societies rather well. This is not to say that they fit the way of life of those societies in the sense of *reflecting* that way of life. However, it appears that they fit their host societies in the sense of addressing—and addressing rather well—psycho-social needs that had arisen during the period in question. Needs, that is, that are not *inherent* in “human nature” but, rather, were specific to the time and place within which they arose.

There is, however, reason to question the *degree* of “fit” of the Mysteries to their host societies. In the first place, although people who have been transplanted to a new location (through choice or otherwise) would be expected to experience anxiety, and even their children might experience some degree of anxiety (transferred to them by their parents), one would expect that after a few generations this anxiety would disappear. If one is not anxious, why should one join a Mystery group? After all, one does not become a member just because one’s parent are (although this is certainly an important consideration!—for one does not lose a need to socialize with one’s fellows).. It would seem that the only reason, then, for joining a particular Mystery group would be fellowship with others. But if one is looking for fellowship, why not join some other association instead? One that provides a better “fit” with one’s needs as they are.

Second, with the advance in knowledge (especially with Greek philosophers, defined broadly) the stories involving gods would become less and less believable. Not only this; they would become uninteresting! Thus, why would one want to join a Mystery cult wherein these gods were taken seriously? One might not be able to find a fellowship that was purely secular in lacking a patron god; but at least one should be able to find a fellowship that only gave lip service to its patron god. The point here being that one might not be able to find a fellowship that “fit” one’s understanding of the nature of Reality so far as gods are concerned, but one should be able to find one that fit better than any Mystery group. Why, then, join a *Mystery* cult?

What I am suggesting here is that although the Mysteries provided a good “fit” when first introduced, and perhaps did for several decades after, over time that “fit” became less and less good. Of course, during the period in question there were frequent disturbances, and these produced continuing anxiety in certain parts of the population. So that “needfulness” continued to be a phenomenon during this period, affecting different parts of the Mediterranean world at

different times. And although this would continue the “market” for the Mysteries, intellectual progress during the period made the Mysteries obsolete as “truth-telling” institutions. Thus, I am forced to conclude that, e.g., at the time of Jesus's birth the Mysteries were obsolete (if “only” in intellectual terms) everywhere in the Mediterranean world; and that they were *obscenely* obsolete by the time they disappeared in the fifth century CE. Thus, insofar as Christianity borrowed from the Mysteries (which it did heavily), it borrowed obsolete ideas!

Stage One: Precursor Religion

Not much is known about the religion from which the Mysteries were derived, thus not much comment can be offered here. The gods of the Mysteries were invented in Persia, Syria, Anatolia, etc. (as I pointed out earlier), as were the stories involving those gods. And the important fact about those stories is that they were created in agricultural or pastoral societies, with the gods in the stories enacting in their lives events in the external world experienced by these people.³⁴⁶ Just as vegetation dies in the autumn, so did the god die at that time; just as vegetation comes alive in the spring of the year, so is the god resurrected at that time. (Is it, then, surprising that Christians celebrate Easter in the spring?!)

One can say, then, that this “religion” (if one can call it that³⁴⁷) reflected the lives of the people in the host society in the sense of reflecting their *way of life*. One could perhaps add that this “religion” not only mirrored the way of life, but enriched it in that it engaged the imagination. And in that the gods were, at that time, believable, there was no question of the gods being obsolete, unbelievable beings, with the stories involving them being likewise unbelievable. Thus, one could say that the gods fit the society well, and continued so to do until stage two (referring to the four stages of Angus discussed earlier).

The gods during stage one were certainly not regarded as “saviors”: that concept was born with the Mysteries that *derived* from this precursor religion. It’s not clear, indeed, what relationship—if any—these gods had with humans. Did they place *demands* on humans? Probably not. Did they do things *to* or *for* humans? Probably not. Did humans look to them for assistance? Again, probably not. It may be that these gods were just “there,” living lives “out there” some place, lacking involvement with the lives of humans. And that the only relationship that they had with humans is that humans invented stories about them, and that those listening to the stories would obtain enjoyment from the stories. This is not “religion” as *we* understand it; but it’s possible that this was the nature of this precursor “religion.”

³⁴⁶ The Mystery “cults are best understood as replications away from home of religious institutions that were once located in a particular land and people.” Burton L. Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

³⁴⁷ What characteristics does something need to have before one calls it a “religion”? Does it, for example, need to have priests, or at least shamans? Does it need to have certain rites? Not enough is known about the “religion” that preceded the Mysteries to say whether or not it qualifies as a religion, even if we were able to *define* “religion.”

Note that the Mysteries borrowed gods from “home,” but interpreted the stories about them *not* as pertaining to vegetation/Earth, but to *individual human lives*. And the adherent of a Mystery strove to establish a *relationship* with his/her patron god, not simply be entertained by stories about him (or her) or contemplate his/her existence. A relationship that would give one “peace of mind” in the here-and-now, and also give one assurance of a life of blessedness in an afterlife. One can say, in summary then, that the precursor religion reflected a way of life, whereas the Mysteries reflected psycho-social needs that had been generated especially because of physical uprooting (with the qualifications identified in the previous section). Thus, the Mysteries did have a relationship with the “precursor religion” that preceded it, but that connection was a somewhat tenuous one.

Christianity

A previous section emphasizes the commonalities shared by the various Mysteries during Angus’s stage three, but one should keep in mind that there were important differences between individual pairs of Mystery religions. Thus, if one were to compare first-century Christianity with different Mystery religions, one would find that it was fairly similar to some Mysteries, but rather different from other ones. There is no question, however, that the Christianity of the first century CE should be placed in the Mystery category: despite the claim that Christianity emerged from Judaism, the truth of the matter is that the Christianity of the first century had much more in common with any of the Mysteries than it did with any of the existing varieties of Judaism (being, though, somewhat close to the Jewish Therapeutae of Alexandria).

Christianity began as a religion in the stage three category (referring to Angus’s developmental model), but during the fourth century CE moved into the fourth stage. This process can be thought of as beginning with Constantine early in the fourth century, and as having become especially pronounced with Theodosius late in that century. That is, although Christianity had begun as a *private* Mystery (and in that regard was similar to, e.g., Mithraism), during the fourth century CE it emerged as a *state* religion. In the process it lost its “mysterious” quality, but it retained enough Mystery characteristics to regard it as in Angus’s stage four—as a State Religion (if not State Mystery).

In its initial stage of development Christianity differed from other Mystery religions in two basic respects. First, the “savior” associated with Christianity (given the title “Christ,” but not thought of as a messiah in a Palestinian Jewish sense) was proclaimed as a *real person*, not just a mythical being. Otherwise, this savior (i.e., Jesus) was thought of as having had a history like other saviors (e.g., born of a virgin, resurrected). Second, given that Christianity was (according to my theory, at any rate) founded by diaspora Jews, it is not surprising that Christianity was apparently given (in its early stage, at least) a decided ethical component—one, however, that emphasized the *heart* of the Jewish Law, rather than its fringes. One, that is, that emphasized love of God and neighbor as being central directives, with low-level rules for living (such as dietary rules, rules regarding washing, etc.) being either downgraded or abolished altogether. (One might argue that that *had* to occur for Christianity to attract gentiles—it being necessary for Christianity to attract gentiles if it was to survive as a religion.)

Did the Christianity of the first century CE fit the societies of the time in the Near East and Mediterranean Basin? If so, *how* did they fit? One could argue that just as the (other) Mysteries

of the time served certain psycho-social needs, so did Christianity. For I assume that early Christianity had somewhat of an experiential orientation; it³⁴⁸ prized Spirit-filling, although it may not have had the elaborate initiation ceremonies associated with other Mysteries. (And although it may have prized Spirit-filling, it is not at all clear what the early Christians did to become Spirit-filled.)

I would add that Christianity fit the society even better than other Mysteries, first, in that it was based on a real person: there was a basis for an educated person to “believe in” Jesus, whereas such was not the case regarding, e.g., Mithra. Indeed, the fact that Jesus had been a real person means that it was sensible for intellectuals to ask various questions regarding Jesus’s “career”—and they did. And in the early centuries intellectuals devoted a great amount of time and thought to “working out,” e.g., the nature of Jesus’s divinity. Second, Christianity can be thought of as fitting society better than other Mysteries in that its ethical component is something that people needed—and many people recognized this. Many people were attracted to the new religion because of its ethical component; this satisfied a yearning that perhaps one can even say (certainly *I* would) is rooted in “human nature.” At any rate, it appears that at the time there was a widespread appetite for a religion that had an ethical component, and Christianity was about the only religion that had such a component. True, ethical principles were associated with various philosophical schools—but these were not religions, and did not satisfy the hunger that people had for religion (which, at its best, combines the intellectual and experiential).

Christianity was able to attract intellectuals because it, unlike other Mysteries of the time, was based on a real person—and because it had an ethical component oriented to high-level principles (unlike the Judaism of the time, one might argue³⁴⁹). And as Christianity began attracting intellectuals, it thereby began attracting a higher class of individual than it had before. But *that* fact had an important implication for Christianity, for it meant that it began attracting people who were more in thrall to the society’s dominant value system than had been the original members. Such people had an interest in shifting Christianity’s focus away from the original value system (from, indeed, values *per se*) to *beliefs*. And thus such a shift occurred. As that shift was occurring, the Roman Empire itself was crumbling, and leaders of the Church began acquiring political functions to supplement their religious ones. Thus, the Church became a hierarchical organization in which there was dominance (by males), and insistence on “right” belief (i.e., orthodoxy at the expense of orthopraxy).

Constantine evidently perceived (if but unconsciously) the direction the Church was heading, and recognized that Christianity could serve the interests of the State. He therefore began fostering the religion; and later in the fourth century (in 380) Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Given this, it is no wonder that Christianity *became* the Empire, in effect, after the Empire disintegrated. The leaders of this hierarchy were interested in exercising power, and modified Christianity in such a way consistent with that desired end. Thus, they shifted the orientation from proper behavior to proper belief. They could not,

348 *Some* “sects” within it, at any rate.

349 One might argue that by Jesus’s time Judaism had become rather individualistic in orientation—perhaps especially in the diaspora.

however, simply drop a concern for proper behavior. So what they did was to define “proper behavior” in a way that would be supportive of secular values,³⁵⁰ rather than antagonistic with them (as had been the case with Christianity initially). Lip service might continue to be given to the original values, but those values were placed in that “temporal corral” known as Sunday, the “message” being that one is not expected to actually *live* by those values.

The Christianity that exists today has but a tenuous connection with the Christianity of the first century. On the one hand, it has an orientation to proper belief rather than proper behavior. And insofar as it retains an interest in proper behavior, “proper behavior” is defined in a way to reflect the dominant value system rather than countercultural values. A number of avenues have been pursued to invert the original value system, including the following:

- Help others who need help, but don’t give much help, help others without developing empathy for them, and help others grudgingly—out of a sense of obligation only. In addition, refrain from harming others.
- Don’t harm others, but also don’t help them. After all, if others are needy, this is because they are lazy, have developed bad habits (e.g., they drink their money away), and they make bad decisions: they are themselves responsible for whatever misery they face in their lives.
- Do what’s necessary to get into Heaven, but don’t worry how you relate to others. This involves refraining from actions that would tend to hurt others, and engaging in some “good works.” But don’t do such works out of a sense of empathy for others; and restrict oneself to those good works (such as charity balls) that put one in contact with the right people—and minimize the possibility of contact with “riff raff.”
- One’s behavioral requirements as a good Christian are limited to refraining from engaging in vices (“worldly” activities): drinking, smoking, cursing, gambling, playing cards, fornicating, dancing, going to movies, wearing makeup/jewelry, etc. Doing *for* others is not among one’s behavioral requirements; keeping oneself “pure,” rather, is one’s basic behavioral requirement.
- One’s behavioral requirements as a good Christian are limited to doing “religious” things: going to church on a regular basis, participating in the rituals of the denomination in question, serving on church committees . . . and giving money to the church (“giving God His due”). What one does *outside* church is not what’s important for “Christianhood.”
- For one to be a Christian, one must believe certain “facts” regarding Jesus and God: there *is* a God, Jesus was born of a virgin, Jesus was a divine being (the one and only Son of God, indeed), Jesus was crucified, Jesus was resurrected, Jesus subsequently ascended to Heaven, etc. This is the heart of being a Christian; proper behavior is not what being a Christian is all about—except that one must attend church regularly and give one’s “tithe” to support one’s particular Christian church/denomination.

350 For example, re-defining “proper behavior” in ritualistic terms.

- A Christian is one who is a doer of productive work, one who puts in an “honest day’s labor” every day—whether working for oneself, for an employer, or working as an unpaid housewife. Basically, one should mind one’s own business, and should feel no obligation to do for others. One should, however, stay away from vices, primarily because they hinder one from being as productive as one might be. (This is a simplified version of John Calvin’s perspective on Christianity.)
- Contrary to popular opinion, selfishness is good for the society. After all, did not Adam Smith state, in Chapter II, Book IV, of his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) that “By pursuing his own interest . . . [a person] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it”? Therefore, rather than trying to help others (and not harm them), one should concentrate on pursuing what one perceives as one’s own interests; for if everyone did this, the general welfare would be served, and served well. In short, be selfish, and don’t in the least feel guilty about it; being selfish is being Christian, for the good Christian is one who has a societal perspective, and acts for the good of the society.

In fact, not only is selfishness good for the *society*. God has designed us to be aggressive and selfish by nature, and we blaspheme God by trying to go against our God-given natures. Because, however, aggressive behavior does not have the good societal consequences that selfish behavior has, we should try to control aggressive behavior—doing so especially by creating institutions that will tend to keep such behavior in check, thereby minimizing the harm done by such activity. We can also control aggressive behavior via drug-taking, eugenics, and genetic engineering; but because many in the society have objections to at least some of these other measures, it is best to seek institutional answers to the problems created by aggressive behavior.

Whereas the precursor religion (stage one) had reflected the way of life of the majority of people in the given society, and the Mysteries had served psycho-social needs that had arisen with “lowers” (especially) as a result of geographical displacements, Christianity came to serve the interests of the elite. Indeed, beginning with the fourth century CE Church leaders themselves came to constitute the society’s elite. Over time they lost power to kings and other governmental leaders (and, still later, to leaders in the economy), but they continued to provide support to the secular values that guided the society. Of course, different denominations have served different niches within the social structure. Some have served a need on the part of some for emotional outlet. Others have served a need for socialization, for expressing one’s musical talents, for giving one a chance to exert leadership, to be entertained, etc.

Does Christianity Measure Up Today?

For Christianity (or a denomination thereof) to fit societal needs today (and looking especially to the future), it would need to have the following attributes:

- It should be in the tradition of which Jesus was a part. Christianity as it has existed has not been a part of this tradition; rather, it began as a Mystery religion, with limited Judaic features. (It was given enough such features to make it attractive to diaspora Jews, for the initiator(s) of the religion was primarily interested in attracting fellow diaspora Jews,

at least initially. But it was not given Judaism's low-level rules—e.g., regarding circumcision, dietary matters, washings, etc—so that it would also attract gentiles). Thus, rather than looking to Christian history, one should look to the tradition of which Jesus was a part.

- It should have the right orientation. This means that it should have an orientation to well-being, well-being for everyone, not just a few. Here it is of interest that Deuteronomy values a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society, under the assumption (apparently) that that is needed for universal well-being. I happen to agree with this, and would add that one can only have an egalitarian society if the society is small. A small society is not *thereby* egalitarian, of course: we have seen with James Jones-type cults that have formed communities that smallness does not guarantee egalitarianism. On the other hand, however, I would argue that a large-scale society *cannot* be egalitarian. Thus, to have well-being, a society must consist of small communities, but ones with proper institutions.

As we look to the future, there is the threat of global ecocatastrophe which could end human life, and other life as well. Thus, it is necessary for a religion to have an orientation to the *future*, be aware of this threat, and be willing to address it. This might mean, in part, that it would have a commitment to creating eco-communities, and working for a proliferation of such communities.

- It should uphold the God concept, but uphold a definition that is acceptable to the modern (scientific) mind. Beyond this, though, the definition that it creates should not be overly precise, for there is no warrant for a precise definition. It should not involve personification except in the sense that God should be thought of (in part) as a Voice which is a source of ideas/directives.
- The belief system associated with the religion should be one that a modern has no difficulty accepting. This means in part that it cannot make claims about Jesus that are contrary to the results of modern scholarship (see, e.g., Uta Ranke-Heinemann's *Putting Away Childish Things*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).
- It must have institutions which are consistent with the ends upheld by the religion. This means that it must work not only for cooperative eco-communities, but must be centered on the New Word Fellowship.

In short: Christianity does not measure up to what is needed. NeWFism, however, does (see my "Worship" referred to earlier) and therefore warrants development—as to this point, it exists only "on paper."

(Non-) Behavior in Our Urban Society: A NeWFian's Perspective

James B. Gray

For the “NeWFian” (see my [“Worship”](#)), the Bible is of interest primarily insofar as it provides information about the development of The Tradition (see “Worship”). The Tradition has as its focus human well-being (from a societal, rather than “self-improvement,” standpoint). And although the Bible is an important source of information regarding The Tradition, The Tradition itself predates Bible times, and has been continued since Bible times down to the present by numerous individuals. Ironically, however, few of those individuals have been strongly associated with a religious organization!

The concerns of Tradition people have been not only with engaging in direct action to contribute to the well-being of their fellows,³⁵¹ but in “researching” behavior with the hope that the results of that research would prove useful in the furtherance of The Tradition’s purpose. Therefore, Tradition people have, e.g.,

- Created classifications of behavior.
- Engaged in empirical studies of behavior—including studies of the behavior of related species.
- Undertaken explanatory studies.
- Prepared critiques of the existing society.
- Written “utopian” novels.
- Developed plans for bringing about societal (system) change, and worked to implement such plans.
- Etc.

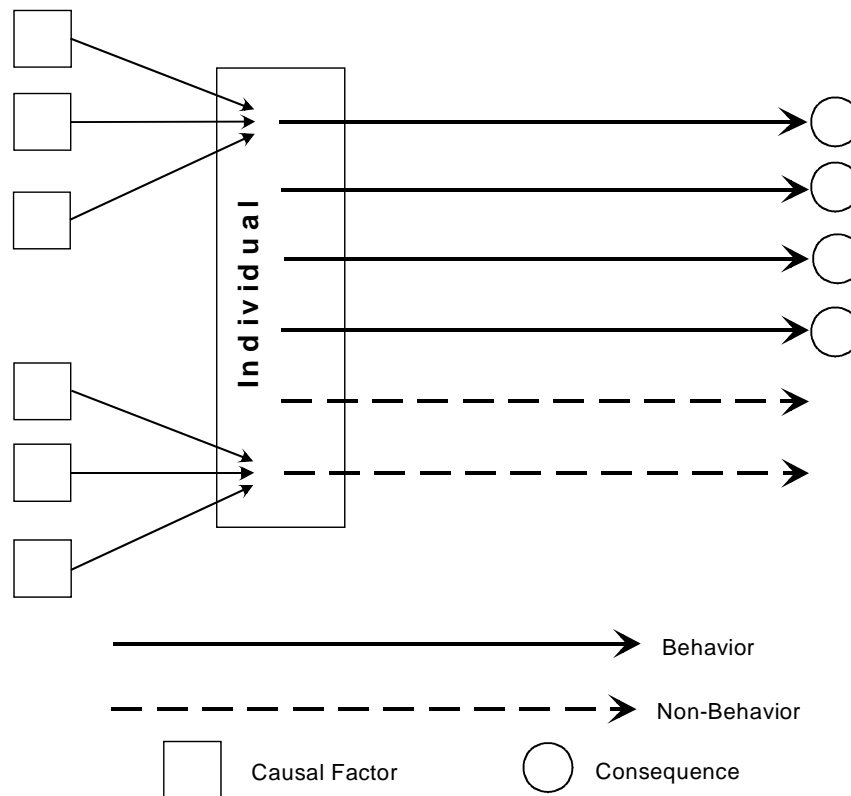
The intellectual³⁵² interests of “Traditionists” overlap considerably with those of scholars in Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, and Economics. However, the orientation of Traditionists is normative, and this fact has at least two implications:

³⁵¹ Behavior undertaken with the *intent* of so contributing does not always have the intended *consequence*, however.

³⁵² “Intellectual” is not used here to convey an attitude of snobbery but, rather, as a substitute for “scholarly.” I eschew the use of “scholarly” here given that the canons of scholarship prevent one from offering evaluative judgments, making recommendations, or engaging in speculation.

- In their interest in human behavior, they are not only interested in classifying, describing, and explaining behavior, but also ascertaining the *effects* of behavior on people's well-being—i.e., the effects of one's behavior not only on oneself, but others as well.
- Their interest is not only in behavior that *occurs*, but in behavior that *fails* to occur (a point to be clarified shortly).

A graphic (below) can help clarify how the Traditionist's orientation differs from that of a "social scientist."



As the graphic suggests, a given individual can be thought of as engaging in various behaviors, and the social scientist is interested in identifying and classifying those behaviors, obtaining empirical information about behaviors, and explaining them. The boxes on the left side of the graphic indicate that for a given behavior several different causal factors (or, more generally, *explanatory* factors) typically are involved. Expressed in statistical language, usually a given "Y" variable (type of behavior in this case) is explained by a series of "X" variables (i.e., explanatory variables).

The Traditionist is interested in this conventional sort of research, but is also interested in ascertaining the *consequences* of a given behavior (along with all other relevant factors, of course) for the well-being level of the person behaving, as well as others who may be affected. Regarding the latter, the Traditionist holds that a high level of well-being—individual and

collective—is *desirable*, so that a determination of how (whether positive, negative, or neutral) a given behavior affects well-being always involves an implicit value judgment in addition to a description.

Finally, note the “dashed” lines of the figure, these designating non-behaviors—which, therefore, have (from a certain perspective) neither causes *nor* consequences. What I am referring to here as “non-behaviors” stems from the Traditionist’s acceptance of the love command attributed to Jesus (e.g., Mark 12:31—this command having been first stated in Leviticus 19:18). One of the interests of the Traditionist is the fact that although the society we live in is ostensibly a “Christian” one, there is little evidence that that command is followed very extensively. Given this fact, the Traditionist is interested in explaining why this is so—i.e., explaining the significant *absence* of behavior that could be considered in accord with the love command.

Regarding this latter point, what is puzzling to the modern Traditionist is that s/he knows that humans are “programmed” to have empathy for others (especially *in-group* others), and therefore programmed to behave toward others in a manner consistent with the “love of neighbor” command.³⁵³ Given that humans are naturally inclined to engage in that sort of behavior, yet that sort of behavior, although certainly not absent from our society³⁵⁴ (among other societies), is not common either, the question arises for the Traditionist is: Why is such behavior not more common? *That* question, then, is one of interest to the contemporary Traditionists—while *not* being a question of interest to, e.g., sociologists.

The reason why the Traditionist is interested in explaining why people behave as they do—and *fail* to behave as they “should”—is that s/he believes that if the reasons for objectionable behavior that *does* occur (or desirable behavior that *should* occur) can be discovered, there is the possibility that changes in behavior can be brought about. What one needs to do, in discovering the causes of behavior (or non-behavior), is first to determine which causes are amenable to change, which not; and then, second, is to determine what might be done to bring about that change. Accomplishing the latter objective, note, is something that requires creativity: empirical research *per se* will not give one answers here.

It should be clear, then, that although only some Traditionists are activists in the traditional sense, *all* Traditionists are activists. For even those Traditionists who are “only” doing intellectual work are activists in the sense of having a *normative* orientation. That is, like traditional activists, they are not content with “the way things are,” and express that disaffection by becoming informed on matters that they deem relevant to their interests, by making value judgments, and by making recommendations—making an effort to publicize their thoughts on the latter two matters.

In writing this essay from the perspective of a Traditionist, I wish to “hone in” on two topics in particular. In the first section I describe what I regard to be salient facts regarding behavior in this urban society, and then offer some explanatory comments relative to those facts. In the second section I then present a classification of reasons why behavior in conformance with the

353 See, e.g., Frans de Waal, *Our Inner Ape*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005. De Waal is a world-famous primatologist at Emory University.

354 Were it common, our society would be virtually problem-free—which it certainly is not.

love command is not more common in our society, and then relate that discussion to that presented in the first question. For the categories in that classification I would like to be able to supply empirical data that would indicate the absolute and relative importance of each reason. Unfortunately, however, I lack access to such data—and even if I had it, such data would not contribute much of importance to the presentation.

Behavior in Our Urban Society

Were Christianity a true child of Judaism, it would have an orientation to *behavior* rather than *belief*.³⁵⁵ And if it *did* have such an orientation, the concerns of Christians would be on such matters as:

- Engaging, so far as possible, in behaviors that would contribute to the well-being of one's fellows (and *refraining* from engaging in behaviors that would be hurtful).
- Identifying types of behaviors (i.e., developing classifications of behavior).
- Ascertaining empirical facts regarding different kinds of behaviors (as well as specific behaviors).
- Creating, and then testing, explanations regarding behaviors.
- Developing plans/strategies for preventing hurtful (i.e., “sinful”!) behaviors, and for dealing with those who have committed crimes, been apprehended, and are now subject to some sort of “treatment.”

Following the above “advice,” my focus in this section will be on the *explanation* component of the above work, with particular attention being given to the matter of explaining behavior in our urban society. In pursuing this focus, let me begin by noting that at least three (3) pitfalls face a person who is intent upon studying human behavior:

- One may choose to focus on the effects of a single causal factor (e.g., genes), and thereby ignore the possible relevance of other explanatory factors. The particular danger here is that the “other” factors may have even more explanatory “power” than the factor being given attention—rendering one’s “findings” not only misleading, but scientifically worthless.
- One’s focus may be proper—i.e., on *behavior*, rather than a purported *cause* of behavior—but one may examine that behavior (e.g., “violence”) in isolation—as if it has no relationship with other sorts of behavior. The fact of the matter is that a given type of behavior is

³⁵⁵ See, e.g., the introductory chapters of Barrie Wilson, *How Jesus Became Christian*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008. Wilson notes in his Prologue (p. xiv): “We all customize religion, based on our own experiences and sense of what is of ultimate importance in life. In my own case, my journey has taken me from Episcopalian into Judaism. I find that a religion focusing primarily on behavior rather than on belief fits better with my sense of what religion should be. Oddly enough, I also find that approach closer to the religion of Jesus than the one that developed *about* him.”

commonly but one part of a *behavioral system*—meaning that a given type of behavior can only be understood as an integral part of that system.

- Even if one's focus is on a behavioral system, one may fail to give consideration to the fact that there is such a thing as "behavioral domains;" and unless one confines one's attention to behavior in a certain specific behavioral domain, one's results may be meaningless. The point here is that what distinguishes a given such domain from another domain is that a unique set of causal factors operate in any given behavioral domain, and if one's study involves a mixture of behavioral domains, one's "findings" will be difficult, if not impossible, to interpret—and therefore be scientifically worthless.

The relevant starting point of any study of human behavior is the identification of a particular behavior domain (or realm). Next, one must identify the particular set of causal factors believed to be operative in that domain. And, finally, one is faced with the task of determining the relative role of those factors in explaining the array of behaviors observable in the given domain. Note that in referring to a *behavioral domain* I am not referring to a *study area*: for a given study area several behavioral domains are likely to exist, and it is important keep one's focus on just the *chosen* behavioral domain so that one does not "pollute" one's study with the extraneous.

The discussion which follows in this section focuses on a particular behavioral domain, our contemporary urban society. The presentation makes no pretence, however, of being a record of a scientific research study. Rather, the discussion in this section is better conceived as an hypothesis of sorts—a presentation of a *framework* that might be used by researchers to form the basis for their research. In a sense, what I am proposing here is a *paradigm*, but one at an early stage, and therefore perhaps better termed a *paradigmatic hypothesis*.

Given my focus here on explaining behavior in our urban society, and the particular behavior domain that I have in mind, my basic assumption is that *the* basic causal factor operating in this "domain" is a certain *value*—the *success imperative*.³⁵⁶ Then, using that assumption, I identify population segments (three in all) within the population, and next discuss the behaviors of people in a given segment as those people respond, behaviorally, to that imperative (behaviors that I *hypothesize*, let me add). This is not to say that other factors are not operating in this domain; my position here, however, is that the success imperative factor overshadows all other factors in this particular domain, thereby rendering all other conceivable factors too insignificant to merit attention. Others may not accept this position; *I*, however, am convinced that it is a sound one. Whether it is or not remains to be determined via soundly-conducted empirical research, of course.

³⁵⁶ I do not herein explore the matter of *why* this value plays the role it does in our society—i.e., how it came to occupy the commanding position it does. See, however, Donald Gilbert McKinley's "The Ethos of Industrial America" (Chapter 3, pp. 29 – 46) for an excellent brief discussion of relevance here. *Social Class and Family Life*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964.

Before proceeding to a presentation of my “framework” for analyzing behavior in our urban society, along with my specific “hypotheses,” let me make a few comments of a background nature.

1. *Some Background Comments*

The rise of cities—first on the basis of commerce, then industry, and more recently “tertiary” activities (personal and business services, government, etc.)—is usually conceived as a triumph of human intelligence and creativity, but can also be conceived as a *pathological* phenomenon. I state the latter because the rise of cities has been integrally related to an increase in The Discrepancy—which refers to the fact that with the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago, the ways of life of people began to change in that:

- Some of the stimuli associated with the old way of life began to disappear, to be replaced with new stimuli.
- Some of the old items ingested for sustenance began to recede in importance, to be replaced with new such items.
- Some of the behaviors associated with the old way of life began to be replaced with new behaviors.

In asserting that the rise of cities has been integrally related to an increase of the Discrepancy, I mean, of course, that there has been *two-way causation* involving the two: An increasing Discrepancy has been a causal factor in, e.g., the rise of cities; on the other hand, the rise of cities has contributed to an increasing Discrepancy. Indeed, it would seem that the rise of cities initiated a process whereby not only would the Discrepancy increase over time, but at an increasing *rate*—the sort of change that hardly warrants the label “progress.”

Given the interactions that have occurred, over time, between urbanization, on the one hand, and an increasing Discrepancy, on the other, it should be evident that to label our society today as an *urban* one is to convey only *part* of the truth about our society—a *neutral* truth at that. There is little question that our society is an urban one; indeed, one could add (following the lead of German geographer Walter Christaller) that our society is characterized by a *hierarchy* of urban areas. But even *that* qualification adds little to our understanding of the society from the standpoint of what it *means* to those people who are a part of the societal system. If, however, we refer to those people as *inmates*, we are adding some insight into the process of urbanization, for we are suggesting that urbanites are living a *constrained* life relative to their “design specifications”³⁵⁷—and the connotations of such a label would somewhat accurately allude to the “condition” of their lives. Which, once we became cognizant of that “condition,” would make us realize that referring to the rise of cities as a pathological phenomenon is an entirely accurate characterization.

My primary focus in this section is on the pathologies associated with urban living, but first let us establish some of the salient features of urban life (particularly as we know it today):

³⁵⁷ This is a concept developed by George Edgin Pugh in his brilliant *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1977.

- Most adult males—and many adult females—sustain themselves (and their families—if they have families) by selling their “labor” to large organizations, then using the money received in exchange to purchase that which is needed for sustenance, along with whatever “luxury” items the individual “wants”³⁵⁸ and can afford.
- Trip-making behavior is required from the “home base” to the place of employment, and from the home base to retail stores, professional offices, stadia (for sports events), concert halls, etc.
- The activities engaged in as an employee are typically limited in scope. This is *really* what is meant when one says that a high degree of specialization exists.
- The set of occupations associated with any given organization typically form a hierarchy of authority/responsibility, the relation of one “position” to another being described in an organizational (“org”) chart.
- Few of the activities engaged in by employees are directly involved with the production of “necessities”—or even “luxuries,” for that matter. Rather, most of their activities are only *indirectly* related to production activities.
- The fact that positions typically form a hierarchy within any given organization implies that remuneration typically varies with position in the hierarchy—for, after all, the higher the position, the more important it is (so the theory goes), so that the occupant of a “high” position deserves—and receives—a high income.
- The fact of income variation suggests that a social class system exists in any given urban society. Such a system is not as rigid as a caste system (wherein one must remain in the caste into which one was born), but (as John Rawls noted some years ago) the existence of the family as an institution tends to reduce social mobility—given that one’s family situation constrains (for “lowers,” at least) one’s vertical “movement” (not only because family financial and “connection” resources vary, but because the *values* inculcated in one vary from family to family).
- Although income variation is *rationalized* on the basis of there (supposedly) being a strong correlation between income and desert, a more accurate perspective on the societal system is one that focuses on *exploitation*: An elite exists which has substantial wealth (with some members of the elite using some of that wealth to influence events), receiving that wealth through various sorts of exploitative activities conducted relative to non-elite members of the society in question and members of other societies (“less advanced” ones in particular). Thus, there is very little truth to the societal myth that those in the work force are rewarded in proportion to desert.

358 As for advertising plays no role in one’s “wants”!

- Although the typical city “houses” both the rich and the poor, that housing tends not occur on a random basis spatially but, rather, is highly segregated—so that the rich have as neighbors other rich people, the poor have as neighbors other poor people, etc.

I should perhaps add, for the sake of clarification, that the existence of “specialization” in an urban society implies interdependence, but that “interdependence” is a term that, in this case, is misleading in its implications. “Interdependence” suggests that those in a situation of “interdependence” are *equal* in their influence. The reality, however, is that (as George Orwell noted in *Animal Farm*) “some people are more equal than others”: some are more at others’ mercy than others are. That is, some are more in a situation of *dependence* than are others. Now given that being in a position of dependence increases one’s risk of being exploited, it is not surprising that that risk is taken advantage of by some others—especially if, for the urban society in question, the reigning value is the success imperative. Indeed, one can argue that although in our societal mythology the existence of a social class system is commonly attributed to differences between people in innate intelligence, willingness to work hard, etc., it is likely that a—if not *the*—primary explanatory factors here are the fact that (a) some are more *inclined* (as, e.g., the result of the values inculcated into them during their upbringing) to engage in exploitative behavior than others, combined with the fact that (b) some are more *subject* to exploitation than others.³⁵⁹

The above description of our urban society would largely apply to most other urban societies as well (contemporary ones in particular). However, the “animating force” in our society does not necessarily coincide with that associated with other contemporary urban societies (e.g., in Europe). For in our society, it seems clear that a “success imperative” is the driving force that animates our society. To a degree, one can state that this success imperative has helped give our society its particular “shape”—e.g., it helps explain why residential segregation exists on the basis of income/wealth. However, the main relevance of the success imperative—which can be labeled as a *societal value* that is accepted by most members of the society, for reasons not explored here³⁶⁰—is its impact on the *well-being* situation of members, along with their *behavioral* patterns.

For the purpose of discussing those impacts, it is useful (for me as a Traditionist) to think of the population of the society (its cities in particular) as consisting of three (3) groups, the elite, the middle class, and the poor. Let us begin with the elite, which, from a behavioral standpoint, can

³⁵⁹ Insofar as it is true that the “inclinations” referred to here have a biological base, it does not follow that they cannot be controlled. Taking a cue from James Madison (i.e., his faith in an institutional solution in the design of the United States national governmental system), I argue in “[Worship](#)” that the New Word Fellowship can help minimize these tendencies.

³⁶⁰ In a previous footnote I referred to a relevant discussion by D. G. McKinley. Here I would add, though, that explaining—in a comprehensive manner—why “success” has emerged as the dominant societal value would be very difficult to do. Its *fundamental* roots certainly lie in the fact of The Discrepancy, but its *specific* roots cannot be stated with any degree of certainty. One can, however, note that it is a value that is widely promoted, directly and indirectly. Regarding the latter, the promotion of products/services helps stimulate demand which, to satisfy (legally) requires that one make purchases, the money for those purchases coming from one’s work (and/or investments). Thus, insofar as one’s needs are aroused, one needs to gain as much “success” as possible to satisfy those needs.

be (following the lead of Thorstein Veblen) thought of as consisting of predators and parasites. Those in the former group are ones who are actively involved in exploiting others through making decisions that impact negatively on others. The parasitical element within the elite are not, like the predators, “influentials” but, rather, are people who, through their “investments,” live off the work performed by non-elite members of the society. Another way of perceiving these two groups is that the former are typically newer arrivals to the elite than the latter.

a. The Elite

Given that the human, *qua* human, can be said (following the lead of, e.g., primatologist Frans de Waal) to have a natural tendency to be empathetic relative to his/her fellows, and that a person who has empathy for his/her fellows will not be either a predator *or* a parasite, the question arises: How are members of the elite able to suppress their natural inclination to be empathetic to the degree that that feeling does not arise—or arise with enough force to influence their thinking and behavior? Let us, in answering this question, first take the case of the predator. Such a person plays an active role in the economy, thereby coming in contact with a variety of people; yet this latter fact does not result in feelings of empathy arising as a result of that contact. Why not?

First, the person has access to a widely-accepted ideology that convinces him (or her) that he is playing a useful—indeed, highly important—role in the economy, and therefore deserves to be well-rewarded.³⁶¹ He is therefore able to “screw” others in good conscience. Second, he lives in an exclusive area, with neighbors like himself; and in socializing especially with other like people, his view that he is playing a key role in the economy is further re-inforced. Finally, given that the media are controlled by some members of the media, these people are careful to present the needy in the society as not needy but, rather, as trouble-makers—or at least people who make bad choices. Thus, they ensure that the needy are portrayed in such a way that, e.g., viewers of TV—whether members of the elite or others—become convinced that “lowers” should be perceived in terms other than neediness, and therefore certainly not deserving of any sort of assistance—private or governmental.

Those who are “merely” parasites are able to suppress feelings of empathy for the needy in the society by, first, receiving an upbringing that convinces them that they are naturally superior to others; so that even though, in having servants, they come in contact with lowers, they pay these individuals well enough that they aren’t terribly needy, and they have no difficulty feeling superior to their servants because the servants are often from a different ethnic group, lack in education, etc. Other than some interactions with servants, parasites tend to confine their contacts with others of the same status (as parasites)—at parties and social events.

Ordinary shopping would be done for them by servants, and other shopping would be done at establishments that only the rich *could* patronize; so that in doing such shopping, the only lowers encountered would be clerical workers. Parasites, then, tend to lack empathy for others (others of the non-elite, that is) because they were brought up to think of themselves as superior, because they have little contact with non-elite people (including on TV), and because the contact they *do*

³⁶¹ This ideology has a number of components, the major one being Social Darwinism. Another is the sociological argument expressed in the Davis-Moore thesis.

have with such people tends to be limited to those whom they easily perceive as inferior to themselves. The fact that such people attend “charity balls” seemingly suggests that they have some concern for the less fortunate. But these balls are for “show” rather than being an expression of concern. For if members of the elite were sincere in their ostensible interest in the poor, there would *be* no poor (as Deuteronomy 15:11 suggests).

b. The Poor

If the notable facts about the elite are that they are wealthy, some being predators while others are parasites, and they lack empathy for lowers (so that they can be predators and parasites in good conscience), the notable fact (relative to behavior) about the poor is their poverty. This not only limits their ability to consume, but causes them to lose their self-respect—insofar as they must obtain help from other people or from public or private organizations. The fact that their consumption is limited may very well mean that they experience health problems—including mental health problems, which may help them cope, but exacerbate their poverty situation. Their situation may drive some in this category to turn to cheap drink for comfort, or to smoking cigarettes (which in some cases have been scrounged). In some cases their poverty may result in petty crimes such as muggings or burglaries—or even killings, in some cases. Because their poverty prevents them from becoming educated, not only are they stuck in their situation, but their children are as well. Because they may very well be coarse, unkempt, and smelly, it is difficult for them to attract others to them for the purpose of giving them help. Even in a “Christian” society such as ours!

Thus, it is extremely difficult for those in this class ever to escape it. Why does the elite not help those in this class? In part, because many of them are not aware of their existence, having been careful to control the means of their gaining such knowledge. But insofar as members of the elite *are* aware of the presence of lowers, they do little, if anything, to help such people in part because such people are *useful* to them. Not in terms of what such people directly *do* for them, but in terms of the fact that the existence of such people can represent a *diversion* for those in the middle class. That is, if middle class people think about lowers (as disgusting people), they are less likely to think about the elite and what *it* is doing—including to *them*.

How do people in this group respond to the success imperative? Ironically, many of them accept this societal value, even though their poverty prevents them from *acting* on it—except for striving for a certain level of “decency.” Basically, however, their poverty plays a more important role in their lives than the success imperative, acting primarily to restrict their behavior and forcing them to engage in behaviors that they might not approve of—or engage in were their situation different.

c. The Middle Class

The Middle Class is herein thought of as the largest of the three groups (the elite being smallest), and therefore rather diverse in character—so that the “upper” portion of the class shares many of the characteristics of members of the elite (the predatory portion in particular), and the “lower” portion is on the margin of being in the poor group). Members of this group can be characterized as *strivers*, primarily striving to obtain as much money as possible; which does not mean, however, that power and fame are not also sought after.

What a middle-class person strives for, and *how successful* one is in attaining one's goals, depends in large part on one's family background—"one's choice of parents"! One's family background not only determines what resources will be available in preparing oneself for a career, but one's "connections," and one's value system. The latter plays a role primarily in affecting the sort of career that one prepares oneself for, and subsequently enters. Should one enter the corporate world, and strive to reach the top? Should one enter the law, and strive to join a prestigious partnership? Should one enter the medical field? Should one become an academic, striving eventually to become an administrator? Should one enter the ministry? Depending largely on one's family background, one will choose a career path that reflects that background. The opportunities for attaining wealth will, of course, vary depending on the path chosen—along with one's own personal attributes and other factors. But whichever path chosen, one should be able to attain a reasonable comfortable standard of living (as "standard of living" is conventionally defined in our society³⁶²).

The closer one is to the poverty group, however, the less bright will one's prospects be for "success." If one is able to attend a college/university, it is not likely to be a prestigious one. One's parents are likely to lack important contacts. Even the values that have been inculcated into oneself may be such as to make one only marginally ambitious; so that in not having been "bred" to be driven, one may *not*, in fact, strive hard—and for that reason alone not make much "progress." As a consequence, one may end up practicing a trade, working in retail or a service business, or become a "Dilbert" sort of person who works in a cubicle in a large corporation.

Actual success (measured, e.g., in monetary terms) does not necessarily equate with *perceived* success (on the part of the individual in question), so that a person at the upper end of the middle class may feel like s/he is a failure, whereas one near the bottom of the group may be relatively content with his/her position. But insofar as one perceives that one has *not* been successful (relative to one's aspirations), one may be "driven" to engage in various *compensatory* behaviors.³⁶³ Such behaviors can be categorized as to their "direction," from behaviors directed toward oneself (and, indirectly, toward other members of one's family) to behaviors directed toward others to an intermediate category of basically neutral behaviors.

Behaviors directed toward *oneself*—in the sense that, although not freely-chosen, they tend to be hurtful to oneself (and one's family—if one has one)—can be thought of as including excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages, gambling, over-eating, drug-taking, "cutting"—and suicide, of course. In addition, one may *unconsciously* react to the stresses one faces by developing various psychosomatic—and/or other—diseases.³⁶⁴

³⁶² *Not* the perspective of, e.g., Duane Elgin! See his *Voluntary Simplicity*. New York: William Morrow, 1993.

³⁶³ These are better termed *substitutionary* behaviors, given that they do not necessarily act as true compensatory behaviors.

³⁶⁴ Of relevance here is Noel T. Boaz, *Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

Behaviors directed against others would include spreading false rumors, sabotaging the efforts of others—for those at the upper end of the group. And mugging, burglarizing, and killing for those at the lower end.

Behaviors of a more *neutral* nature would include spending an excessive amount of time involved in diversionary activities (such as TV watching, spectator sports), excessive busyness, excessive attention to maintaining one's physical fitness, an obsession with sex, an obsession with political matters, various compulsions and phobias—and an interest in church activities for inappropriate reasons (e.g., feeding one's ego via becoming active in certain committees, playing in the church orchestra).

d. Conclusions

My purpose in this section has not been to provide any definitive conclusions as to behavior in our urban society but, rather, to suggest that a wholistic perspective should be used in some of the research done regarding human behavior. Not that *only* that type of research should occur. Indeed, not that only research on one “level” should be undertaken. Rather, research should be undertaken at several different levels, for research done at one level can help “inform” and guide research done at other levels. From the standpoint of a Tradition member, of course, research is not done as an end in itself. Research is done, rather, as an aid for action. Without proper research, there is the possibility that behavior done with the intent of helping others will be of a short-term nature only—and even then, inadequate in scope.

Research and action should be handmaidens, with research providing direction to actions, and reflections on actions providing input in the development of plans. For plans are built not only on empirical findings that describe and explain, but also on ideas concerning what will work and what won't. Such ideas can only come from practical work in the attempted implementation of plans. Ideas of this sort do not, however, emerge automatically: it should never be forgotten that creativity is necessarily involved here, so that institutions that conduce creative thinking (such as the New Word Fellowship; see my “Worship”) should be both created and utilized extensively.

Non-Behavior in Our Urban Society

As I indicated at the beginning of this essay, the Traditionist with an intellectual orientation is interested not only in explaining behavior, but *non*-behavior—the non-behavior in question being the relative paucity of behavior, in our society, that is consistent with the “love of neighbor” command. The present section is devoted to this second topic, and my focus here will be on “reasons” for the relative absence of that sort of behavior in our society. As I stated earlier, I would like to be able to associate some quantitative values with these reasons that would indicate degree of importance, but lack such data. I will confine my attention, then, to a discussion of reasons, then relate those reasons to the people categories identified in the previous section.

Below is a classification of reasons that, I believe, identifies the most important categories:

1. People do not perceive need in others.

- a. Because their thinking is controlled by an ideology.
 - b. Because their way of life insulates them.
- 2. People perceive need in others, but:
 - a. Lack money/time.
 - 1) Have a low income.
 - 2) Lack disposable income.
 - b. Have money but:
 - 1) Blame the needy for their problems
 - 2) Perceive the needy as “unfit” from a biological standpoint.

Let us next say a few words about these six (6) categories of reasons. First, there are those who simply do not perceive need in others because their minds are “possessed” by an ideology that convinces them that they should be selfish because not only is selfishness natural, but good. If one’s focus is on “Me,” one runs the risk of in effect thinking that one is the world’s only occupant. That is, with such a mentality one may very well simply not notice other people—whether they are needy or not. Ideology can be regarded as one of the “gifts” of the Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago—a “gift” that prevents one from seeing by placing blinders on the one possessed by an ideology.

If one’s mind is not controlled by an ideology, there still is the possibility that one’s vision will be hindered by a way of life that insulates one from much of reality. Usually a prerequisite for such a way of life is sufficient wealth that enables one to restrict one’s basic contacts with others similarly “situated.” These people then create a world unto themselves that enables them to “contemplate their navels” to the extent of not coming to the realization that their bodies do, in fact, have other parts as well.

Some that perceive need in others are themselves needful because of poverty—a fact which likely contributes to their ability to perceive need in others. Although such people, because of their poverty, would not be expected to have an orientation to the needs of others, many do, but are unable to act on that desire to the extent that they would like to for the simple reason that they lack money, and may also lack time (because of being forced to work at more than one job).

Others who may perceive need in others, and even recognize a duty to “minister” onto such people, refrain from doing so despite having higher incomes than those in the previous group because of pressures exerted on them by the nature of our society. When we have our radios and TVs on, we are constantly bombarded by advertisements encouraging us to buy more, more, more; as we drive down our highways we are forced to view billboards that do the same. We are under constant pressure to “keep up with the Joneses.” And the array of goods/services out there to be purchased is so massive, and one finds it easy to conclude that even if one spent one entire income on one’s “wants,” one still would not be satiated. One might say, I suppose, that there is

a “consumer ideology” that reigns in our society, and that as a consequence most of us have great difficulty resisting the materialistic lures of our society. Meaning, given the present discussion, that even though they are favorably inclined toward the idea that helping others is a “good thing,” the “materialistic pull” of our society causes them to be much less helping—in money and time—than they could be.

Still others who perceive need in others want to deny any responsibility either in causing that need or in helping to alleviate it. One suspects, indeed, that their need to deny responsibility stems from an unconscious recognition that they *do* have responsibility, and “want” to suppress that recognition. How to they “accomplish” that suppression? By inventing reasons that place blame on the victims themselves: they are lazy, they have chosen behaviors that have become bad habits (e.g., excessive drinking, gambling), they have chosen not to acquire a salable skill, etc. By repeating their “explanations” frequently enough, they come to accept “the big lie” (as Hitler put it). And as a consequence, they do little, if anything, to help others in need—even though they have the money and time so to do.

Finally, there are some who, affected (ostensibly, at any rate) by Charles Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” theory argue that those who succeed in the society do so because of superior biological endowment, and those who are at the bottom are in that position because of their inferior endowment. Given that it would be best for the species that these “inferiors” not be present in the society, by no means should they be given any help. Rather, it’s too bad that licenses can’t be issued that would allow “normal” people to kill these inferiors. But because that’s not going to happen, at least we can discourage them from reproducing, encourage them to migrate to another country; but by no means should we help them otherwise.

How do these reasons relate to the categories of people discussed in the previous section?

- Those in the first of the reason categories tend to be in the predator group, and the upper reaches of the middle class.
- Those in the second category tend to be in the parasitic portion of the elite.
- Category three people are likely to be in the poor group—which is not to say, however, that all in the poor group are in category three.
- I suspect that category four people are especially ones toward the middle of the middle class; those in the upper reaches of that class may give more, in absolute terms, in money and time than those in the more middle portion. The point, however, is that such people could give much more than they do.
- Category five people, I suspect, are to be found especially in the lower reaches of the middle class—people who are living close to the edge. These people know what it means to be poor, and therefore can empathize with the poor, yet simply can’t afford to do much, if anything, for the poor out of fear of themselves going over the edge. To resolve the intellectual conflict going on in their minds, they develop a “blame the victim” perspective—which enables them to go on with their tenuous lives with a clear conscience. Unfortunately, in so

doing they provide a useful excuse to richer folk who *could* afford to do for the poor and other needy, but for whatever reasons would prefer not to.

- Fortunately, category six people are rather rare. To hold such a position, one must have a certain degree of intelligence and education, but must have been exposed to some experiences—perhaps while growing up—which have helped give one a perverse perspective.

Conclusions

Knowledge regarding how people behave, why they do, and why they refrain from engaging in certain behaviors can be useful to Tradition people, and therefore should be pursued. Let us, however, keep in mind that knowledge-seeking is a means, not an end.

The Bible's Obsolescence

James B. Gray

The central thesis of the Bible is that the “haves” of a society should attend to the needs of the “have nots”—a thesis attributed to God as that which God expects of humans. Although the diagram on p. 4 of my [Worship](#) can be thought of as summarizing the God-human relationship depicted in the Bible, I point out in that essay that the thrust of the Bible is with humans doing for God rather than God doing for humans. Thus, the well-known *Amazing Grace* hymn, although extremely popular, and seemingly the quintessence of piety, is anything but—for it misconstrues the basic thrust of the Bible.

It is not my intention here, however, to defend the Bible. Nor will I even defend the assertion that what the Bible is fundamentally “about” is the human’s obligations to God. Admittedly, that obligation is not necessarily easy to detect—especially for one who is not in touch with one’s “human nature”: the Bible is filled with plenty of “guff” that diverts one’s attention from its central message, unless one pays careful attention to its words and is in tune with oneself as a biological being.

In stating that I will not defend the Bible here, let me note that my major problem with the Bible (in addition to the excessive extraneous material in it) is that it has an *individualistic* orientation. That is, it (with the exception of a very few passages) takes the existing social order as a “given.” This means that rather than voicing objections to the existence of a social class system, it takes such a system for granted, and merely orders those in the upper echelons to pay heed to those in the lower ones. Perhaps such a stance was “realistic” during the time period when the books comprising the Bible were written; it no longer is, however. Indeed, one of the interesting strands in Western history is the “utopian” literature one—which suggested not only that there was such a thing as a better society, but presented verbal pictures of such a society, hinting thereby that those fictional pictures could be actually brought into being.

Still, it must be admitted that the Bible contains some important content:

- Ideas in the “Old Testament” as to specific behaviors that might be engaged in (including a beautiful passage in Job).
- A brilliant attempt on the part of some of the Old Testament writers to motivate “haves” to do God’s will (such as inventing the story of God’s deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavemasters, as a basis for the covenant concept).
- Matthew’s list of specific behaviors (e.g., feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty) in Chapter 25 of his gospel—being not a mere list, but one presented in a “salvific” context.
- Paul’s recognition that one is best able to do God’s will if one is Spirit-filled.

This content is still important to us moderns. However, the situation that we moderns find ourselves in is such that we no longer need think of doing God’s will in individualistic terms. Now, we can—and must (especially given the “global warming” threat)—think of God’s will in

societal terms. Indeed, we can think of God's will as having a *short-run* component (doing for others in the here-and-now) as well as a *long-run* one (working for not merely societal change, but societal *system* change).

The long-run component, in turn, can be thought of as comprised of at least three parts:

- What goals should the Good Society achieve (so far as possible)? That is, what should give the Good Society its "goodness"?
- What form should the Good Society have? That is, what should it "look like"—what "shape" should it take? Put another way: What characteristics should it have to ensure that its goals are realized?
- How can it be achieved? What steps need to be taken, in what order, and by whom (i.e., what people/organizations)?

My focus here is just on the first question, and my basic assumption is that biologically-based "needs" will be met in the Good Society: what makes the Good Society "good" is that human needs are met in it. Interestingly, in such a society the loving behavior advised by the Bible, although not absent, would not be needed: because the needs of all were met, loving behavior in a Biblical sense would not need to play an important role—and so would not.

In identifying biologically-based "needs" here I look particularly to an important book written by Dr. George Edgin Pugh over 30 years ago.³⁶⁵ Specifically, I draw upon Pugh's list of eleven (11) "motives" (see pp. 279 – 92). The actual categories that I identify, however, represent combinations of Pugh's "motives," except that I ignore his "desire for dominance" motive because his concept of this motive makes clear that he is referring to the *group* tendency for a leadership/influence hierarchy to emerge. In addition, I add an important point derived from microbiologist/pathologist René Dubos. Using Pugh's presentation as a basis (along with a point derived from Dubos), I identify the following seven categories.

First, humans are "programmed" to engage in certain behaviors because of certain specific *feelings* engendered by those behaviors:

- A feeling of being liked by others. Individuals vary, of course, in their innate characteristics (to say nothing of acquired ones), and that fact implies that some are content with not being ill-thought of by others, some have a preference for being actively liked, and still others hunger for admiration.
- A feeling that one is activating and developing one's (innate) abilities—i.e., that one is in a process of self-actualizing (a concept associated with, e.g., Abraham Maslow—a writer not mentioned by Pugh).
- A feeling that one is making a contribution to the group to which one belongs—that one is "pulling one's own weight" by making a contribution that is important for the group. If this

³⁶⁵ *The Biological Origin of Human Values*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.

feeling of making a contribution is combined with a feeling that one is also drawing upon one's unique talents, this will not only contribute to one's self-actualization (which itself gives one pleasure); the knowledge that one is contributing to the group will give one pleasure—and the admiration of oneself that others make known to one (if only through, e.g., facial expressions) will add even further to one's sense of well-being. (Reflect for a moment on what happens to Bill Murray in the movie *Groundhog Day*.)

What might be termed “joy” can be thought of as being associated with all of the three above feelings (in that joy is the more basic feeling). But, second, one can also argue that humans are programmed to engage in certain activities specifically for the feeling of joy that they bring to one:

- Simply *being* with others—and specifically with others with whom one has a similar rearing background. The significance of similarity in this regard is that it provides one with a basis for communicating in a relaxed manner with others in the group.
- Beyond simply being with others (with whom one shares similarities), there is also joy in conversing and working with others. Such activities are, though, only enjoyable if (in the case of conversation) there is give-and-take, rather than domination by one person; and if (in the case of work) there is a sharing of the work, rather than some “slackers” combined with others willing to work intensively.
- Another source of enjoyment in being with others is humor—hearing humorous things that others have to say (and/or watching their antics), and oneself contributing humor. People vary, of course, in their ability to dispense humor, and this fact may lead to those with the most ability in dispensing humor being highly regarded. Still, those lacking in this ability are not likely to feel inferior to those with the ability, for their laughter at the humor dispensed by others will tend to diminish any feelings of jealousy or inferiority that they might otherwise harbor. Because of that fact, humor tends to help build group solidarity—i.e., not only feeling *part* of the group, but feeling *loyal* to it.
- Also, being active physically much of the time not only contributes to physical health, but a feeling of joy. Sexual activity would be included here as also a source of joy, but one is not “driven” to engage in it as much as other physical activities. (That’s usually the case, at any rate!—although there are variations in the importance of sexual activity with age.)

Finally, Dubos has noted that humans, like all other species, developed in a “natural” environment, and as a consequence their bodies developed partially in response to the stimuli associated with the particular environment within which they developed. He has gone on to note that: “Modern man is anxious, even during peace and in the midst of economic affluence, because the technological [i.e., artificial] world that constitutes his immediate environment, by separating him from the natural world under which he evolved, fails to satisfy certain of his unchangeable needs. In many respects, modern man is like a wild animal spending its life in a

zoo [366]; like the animal, he is fed abundantly and protected from inclemencies but deprived of the natural stimuli essential for many functions of his body and his mind.”³⁶⁷

Pugh (as would Leonard) would go on to say that these “needs” (if I may call them that) are not met well in our society today, and that that fact has a variety of negative consequences. He would also add that there are excellent reasons to think that the satisfaction of those needs is “good” and therefore that one *should* seek to satisfy those needs—and that, e.g., governmental units should use those individual needs (along with collective needs) as the basis for their decision-making.³⁶⁸ I basically agree with Dr. Pugh on these matters, but rather than viewing them in secular terms, I view them in religious ones. That is, I would argue that if we are to continue the Biblical tradition, we must move beyond its individualistic orientation—at least in the sense of grafting onto in a societal orientation: developing ideas regarding the “shape” of the Good Society on the one hand, and also working to create such a society out of the sorry mess of a society that we currently live in.

The seven “goals” that I have stated here should not be regarded as “written on marble.” Rather, they should be regarded as suggestive—and I invite others to reshape them, if convinced that that’s necessary. I would insist, however, that those seven goals are rather solidly based.

366 George B. Leonard stated the following about zoos a number of years back: “Perhaps the basic, unacknowledged purpose of every zoo is to distort our children’s perceptions, to show them that living things can be ripped from their biofields and held, still ‘alive,’ behind bars and fences and moats. The children are thus further prepared for what Civilization, through a more complex series of manipulations, going to do to them. It is interesting to note that zoos are primarily featured in those societies that mask their almost paranoid anxieties behind powerful machines of war. . . .” *The Transformation*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., p. 165.

367 *So Human an Animal*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968, p. 16. Keep in mind, regarding Dubos’s use, e.g., of “man” that Dubos was writing at a time when being politically correct was not yet in fashion.

368 He neglects to note that with our society, at least, a Constitution ostensibly provides guidance to members of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of our national government.

Comforting and Disturbing: A Commentary

James B. Gray

How shall one define “Christian” operationally? That is, what sort of *behavior* (defined broadly³⁶⁹) should be associated with one given the label “Christian”? There is lack of agreement on this matter—the disagreement being, indeed, rather substantial. And although one would like to think that this disagreement has its basis in honest differences in interpretation, one suspects that some “interpretations” have their basis, rather, in deliberate attempts to *avoid* honesty in favor of a concept that serves the interests of those who promulgate them—a concept that, e.g., enables them to be “worldly” while having the appearance of being supremely pious.

My purpose here, however, is not so much to comment on the conceptual diversity that exists within Christianity as to make some observations on one particular formulation, the view that the “job” of the Christian is to “comfort the disturbed, and to disturb the comfortable.” The originator of this “formula” is evidently unknown. It is, however, a memorable one, whose “cuteness” would seem to indicate that the author of the formula intended it to be easily remembered rather than taken literally. Which is not to say, however, that the formula is not rather comprehensive in scope—for it is. Indeed, it is the very fact that the formula is rather “meaty” that makes it worthy of analysis.

In commenting on the formula, my first point is that it presents an interesting contrast with the “plan of salvation” formula offered in Matthew 25—which advises people to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc. From the perspective of the “comfort-disturb” formulation, the “plan” formula is a limited one in that its focus is on “comforting”—defined broadly—without any concomitant attention to “disturbing.” It’s true that Jesus admonished his listeners not to ignore the beam in their own eye while directing criticisms at others (good advice!). Yet Jesus himself is quoted as engaging in a diatribe in Matthew 23; and the “Old Testament” prophets are known for their railings against those who were (in their opinion) treating others unjustly. Thus, there is ample evidence in support of the argument that the Christian should not only seek to comfort the disturbed but also disturb the comfortable.

This does not mean, however, that one cannot seek one’s own particular “comfort zone” within this definition as a Christian. That is, second, a given Christian need not assume that his/her duty is *both* to comfort the disturbed *and* disturb the comfortable. Some may believe that their particular talent is with comforting the disturbed, and should therefore feel that it is enough for them to concentrate on that aspect of being a Christian. Others, however, may feel “called” to focus on disturbing the comfortable; and such people should also feel that it is sufficient for them to concentrate on that aspect of being a Christian.

In neither case, however, is it necessary (per the comforting-disturbing perspective) for a Christian to engage full-time in the “work” of being a Christian—whether it is comforting or disturbing. A Christian—like any other person in our society—must spend a considerable amount of time working at a job, traveling to and from work, shopping, etc. And although some

³⁶⁹ To include *beliefs*—or at least *declarations* of same.

of that time is available for one's specifically "Christian" behavior, the latter sort of behavior can most expeditiously be engaged in during "free" time—which for most people is rather limited. Thus, not only should Christians be expected to *specialize* in their Christian behaviors; they should be expected to engage in such activities for only part of the week

Third, a criticism that can be directed against the "plan" formula is that not only is it limited in scope, but does not provide the basis for a religion for the non-elite. That is, because the "plan" formula is directed at "haves," it provides a basis for a religion for "haves"³⁷⁰ but not for "have-nots." The "comfort-disturb" perspective, in contrast, provides the basis for a religion that can include everyone—"religion" here in the sense of philosophy of living, if not in the sense of an umbrella organization. For virtually all of us occupy a position in society such that there are others less fortunate and also more fortunate. Therefore, there are others to whom we can offer assistance, and also others to which we can address criticism for not rendering sufficient assistance; given this, we are all offered three choices: (a) give assistance to others, (b) direct criticism at others, or (c) both.

As an aside, I should mention that "disturbing the comfortable" can entail not only criticizing those perceived as comfortable for their (relative) inaction in ministering to the needs of the less fortunate. It can also involve informing the comfortable of their possible involvement in "contributing" to the very existence of a class of needy persons; so that by inducing feelings of guilt in such people, one may help motivate such people to act. One must keep in mind, however, that the prevailing ideology in our society convinces the comfortable that they bear no responsibility for the plight of the less fortunate; so that attempts to induce feelings of guilt in such people likely will be met with considerable resistance. Still, if efforts are made to help the comfortable become aware that their minds are "possessed" by an ideology, such efforts might meet with some success.

Those intent on motivating the comfortable should, of course, use their best judgment in how to approach the comfortable: should they attempt to induce guilt feelings in such people or, rather, should they attempt to *enlist* such people in efforts to address the needs of the less fortunate? The approach used should, of course, depend on the personalities, etc., of the comfortable to be approached in conjunction with the abilities of those doing the approaching. That is, an attempt should be made to use a pragmatic approach—one calculated to "work" rather than one that involves a mindless aping of the "Old Testament" prophets. Which means that even if one uses the approach of directing criticisms at the comfortable, one does so in a manner calculated to motivate them to act on behalf of the less fortunate: one does not criticize simply to get one's feelings "off one's chest."

A fourth comment on the "comfort-disturb" formula is that insofar as one decides to engage in criticism of the "comfortable," one should not restrict one's attention to those who are comfortable in a *materialistic* sense. In addition, one should include those who are comfortable in a concept of Christianity that one regards as unBiblical. I have particularly in mind those who perceives Christianity in terms of *belief* and who, therefore, perceive "Christian activism" as identifying "lost" people (i.e., those who have divergent beliefs), and working to "save" such people: bringing them to a "saving" knowledge of Jesus (i.e., the "knowledge" that God sent His

³⁷⁰ Which does not, though, mean that "haves" have flocked to the religion!

one and only son Jesus to earth to die on a cross to atone for “our” sins). This rather popular concept of Christianity places little if any emphasis on either ministering to those in need or challenging the rich. As such, this concept of Christianity has little relationship with the Bible: the fact that those addicted to this variety of Christianity often quote the Bible should not be construed as indicating that they understand—or even *want* to understand—what the Bible is “about.”

What’s not commonly understood regarding this popular version of Christianity is that its theology was derived primarily from the pagan mystery cults that were so popular, in Jesus’s time, in the Roman Empire. Given this, it is not surprising that conflict developed early on between rabbinic Judaism and nascent Christianity: for although Jesus was a Jew, the religion that arose in his name drew more from the pagan mysteries than it did from Judaism—which fact helped make the new religion attractive to “gentiles,” but also led to conflict with Jews.

A final comment on the “comfort-disturb” formulation is that although it neatly summarizes what the Bible is “about,” that is not enough to satisfy a *Traditionist* (see my [Worship](#)). A Traditionist sees a need for a Tradition to change over time—believes, in fact (with Delwin Brown), that a Tradition *must* change over time if it is to survive. Given that principle, a Traditionist would note that the orientation of the “comfort-disturb” formulation is to the here-and-now, and that *that* implies that it takes the existing societal system as a “given.” Given that the Traditionist today sees the need for societal system change, s/he would want to graft that perception onto the “comfort-disturb” formulation before accepting it wholeheartedly.

Amazing Travesty

James B. Gray

“Amazing Grace”—the lyrics of which were composed by John Newton (1725 – 1807)—would appear to be the most widely known, and popular, Christian hymn in the United States. Why is it so appealing to USans? Likely because its theology is so compatible with the American Ethos—and thereby so “out of tune” with the thrust of the Bible (see my [Worship](#) for my views on the Bible).

“Amazing Grace” is an unbiblical hymn? How dare I cast aspersions on this great Christian hymn? Well, I do so because the hymn reminds me so much of Jesus’s ministry—but not in a good way. One way of perceiving Jesus’s ministry is he tried to convince his fellow Palestinian Jews that their religious leaders were teaching an inverted—and thereby *perverted*—version of the Law: “blame the victim,” don’t “help the victim.” And one way of perceiving “Amazing Grace” is that it takes the God-human relationship emphasized by Jesus (by the Bible in general, in fact) and turns it on its head—thereby perverting the thrust of Jesus’s ministry (and the general thrust of the Bible to boot). It’s no wonder, then, why “Amazing Grace” is such a popular hymn for USans: it enables them to embrace anti-Jesuan—indeed, anti-Biblical—values under the cover of alleged Biblical support. And the more vociferous USans tend to be about their alleged Bible-loving, the more suspect is that claim. Unfortunately, however, too few USans have studied the Bible intensively to recognize the truth of this statement.

Before elaborating more on my thesis here that loving the Bible and loving “Amazing Grace” are incompatible, it would be well to make a few comments on the hymn’s lyrics. Note, first, regarding these lyrics that Newton refers to himself as a “wretch,” but a wretch who had been saved by grace—an amazing grace, in fact. Given that “grace” is an attribute of a being, the implication here is that the being involved was God: a gracious God (i.e., a courteous, kind, benevolent God) had saved him.

Why was the “fact” that God had displayed kindness toward him “amazing”? We don’t learn this from the lyrics.

What did God do to “save” him? We don’t learn this from the lyrics either. And what did God save Newton *from*? Neither do we learn this from the lyrics—although one suspects that Newton thought of himself as having been saved from an eternity in Hell—for in a later stanza of the hymn he refers to an anticipated “life of joy and peace” after “this flesh and heart shall [have] fail[ed]”

Although the lyrics of the hymn fail to answer certain vital questions that they suggest, we *do* learn from the lyrics that Newton believed that (a) God’s role is that of a savior of humans (i.e., a savior) (the converse of which is that salvation is *only* accomplished by God) and (b) what God saves humans *from* is an eternity in Hell.

These views *do*, admittedly, have a Biblical basis—but only in part. In the “Old Testament” (an insulting term that Christians use for the Hebrew Bible)—perhaps especially in the book of Psalms—we find reference to God as a savior, but in these passages God is appealed to in the

context of the *here-and-now*—to save one from one’s enemies who are currently posing a threat. In the Old Testament God is not thought of as a being that has the capability of saving one from Hell—for the simple reason that the concept of Hell is foreign to the Old Testament.

But not the “New Testament.” The question that arises here, however, is: In the New Testament is God portrayed as a being who will save one from Hell—so that, e.g., one can pray to God in a petitionary sense, requesting of God that he save one from Hell?

In “mining” the New Testament for an answer to this question I suggest that our primary search be of words attributed to Jesus in the gospels; and that secondarily we use the approach used by Thomas Jefferson as he went about putting together his expurgated version of the Bible: pay attention to that which *resonates* with us rather than undertake a scholarly analysis for an “objective” answer.

Using the first principle, we do, in fact, receive a definitive answer; for the only explicit discussion of salvation put into Jesus’s mouth in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 25—wherein Jesus suggests that (a) *God* does not save us but, rather, our salvation is up to *us*—via our *actions*, those actions resulting from our *choices*; and (b) the actions, on our part, that will result in our salvation (from an afterlife in Hell, assumedly) are ones having the intention of contributing to the well-being of our fellows (feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, etc.) Salvation, then, (a) results from our *actions*, (b) *only* from actions, and (c) only from *certain* actions. Salvation does not result from, e.g., the possession/profession of certain *beliefs* (whether regarding God or Jesus or . . .); nor does it result from actions that evince piety or adherence to religious conventions. Salvation results, rather, *only* from actions, and specifically actions having the intent of contributing to the well-being of others. And although Jesus did not say as much, we can add to Jesus’s discussion of salvation that “others” should be interpreted as including not just others in the here-and-now, but *posterity*: concern with solving the “global warming” problem should be among the concerns of anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus and/or person who claims to honor Biblical principles.

Not only do we have Jesus’s words stating that salvation comes from us, from our actions, and specifically from our actions aimed at contributing to the welfare of our fellows. The passages in the New Testament that *resonate* with us have precisely the same message. One thinks, for example, of the well-known Good Samaritan parable in Luke’s gospel. Paul’s discussions of “fruits” of the (Holy) Spirit. The statements in I John that God is love—not that God is *loving*, mind you, but that God *is* love. Etc.

“Amazing Grace” is seriously out of tune with this concept of salvation—but that should not cause us to be highly critical of John Newton. After all, the Christianity of his time in England was an inverted—and thereby perverted—version of the religion of Jesus: if that’s the sort of religion one is exposed to, it’s no wonder that one would have a difficult time gaining a clear concept of Jesus’s notion of salvation.

Likewise, it is no wonder that the modern USan would have a difficult time coming to comprehend Jesus’s concept of salvation—for what “Christian” denomination teaches it?! Some denominations—or at least churches—teach the very opposite (!)—teaching that it is good to be self-interested. (As if such an orientation will even lead to happiness—a “philosophy”

discredited by psychologist Bernard Rimland in some famous research.) And those denominations (I was about to type “*demoninations*”!)/churches that *do* give any attention to Matthew 25 typically fail to present it as a plan of salvation—rather simply presenting it as giving a few suggestions for right living among other components of such living (the Matthew 25 components perhaps not even being important ones!).

Why does this situation exist? One possible answer is a “survival of the fittest” one. That is, one possible explanation is that USans want to live by the dominant values of our culture (such as individualism, selfishness, materialism), but also want some sort of “intellectual” *support* for accepting a value system that they “know” is contrary to human nature (as we are discovering—from the research of, e.g., Frans de Waal). Denominations and churches have therefore arisen to accommodate USans in this desire—differences between denominations/churches being explained on the basis of social class (i.e., members of different social classes have different needs), ethnicity, and the like.

Is there any hope that “Christian” churches might become “converted”—to “Jesuan”/Biblical ones, that is? No, not really. Given that societies are systems, with the parts of a given system working together (rather than at odds with one another), so long as the Existing Order continues, USan Christianity must retain its current general character. Only if societal system change were to occur would there be hope for such conversion to occur—and such change does not appear to be on the horizon. *That* fact may mean not only that Christianity will continue to retain its essentially pagan character, but that humankind itself will be extinct before the end of the century; and if *that* occurs, no such conversion will be necessary!

Amen. (Not!)

October 10, 2008

Restoring Democracy . . . and More

A Modern “Plan of Salvation”

Alton C. Thompson

The dawn of a new century has done little, if anything, to increase the optimism of the American people. For:

- Wages/salaries have been stagnant—at most—for most.
- Energy costs have shot up—resulting not only in increased costs for operating a motor vehicle, but for food and other products.
- “Health” (better termed “illness”) insurance costs have increased—while benefits have gone in the other direction, and co-pays have gone up.
- College/university costs have become unaffordable for many.
- Unemployment has reached high levels.
- Foreclosures have increased at an alarming rate.
- 401k and other accounts have been hit hard.
- Bankruptcies have become more and more common.

In addition, “we” attacked a country that posed no threat to us—and in the process have lost thousands of our service people (with thousands more receiving serious injuries), killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and incurred huge expenses. In the process of prosecuting this illegal and immoral “war,” we have detained hundreds of “the enemy”—treating them as if they have no rights, and torturing many. And with the threat of terrorism as an excuse, we have lost many of our civil liberties (via the “Patriot” Act). We have done virtually nothing to halt the process of “global warming.” And, most recently (and currently, in fact), we have experienced a banking crisis.

Given all that has been happening during the past few decades—brought to a head in the recent financial meltdown—it is not surprising that many in our society are frustrated and angry. Also, however, it is not surprising that, e.g., the anger being expressed—e.g., at recent John McCain/Sarah Palin rallies—is *misdirected*. That is, it is not surprising that the comments made by some of these angry individuals evince abysmal ignorance: too many in our society are too busy/lazy to become informed—and our media do little to provide the public with accurate, detailed, relevant information. What is particularly ironic about the anger expressed at McCain/Palin rallies is that the candidate favored by those expressing anger is even less likely to do anything for them than the “other guy” (i.e., Barack Obama).

Why are we in such a mess currently? The direct answer would appear to be the reign of a radical *laissez-faire* philosophy during the past few decades (thanks to the efforts of that great “patriot,” Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago). A reign—let’s be honest about the matter—supported by Democrats and Republicans alike. A reign that has resulted in increased deregulation during the past 30 years—whether the person in the White House was a Republican or a Democrat. (For example, the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act was repealed in 1999—i.e., during the William J. (“Bill”) Clinton administration.)

However, a more complete explanation would note a series of interrelated causes:

- An increased determination on the part of some members of the elite further to extend their control over the society—including over those institutions that provide ostensibly objective information.
- Efforts, by some members of the elite, and based on that determination, to effectuate increased consolidation (organizationally) in the economic realm. Those efforts have included the support of lobbying efforts to decriminalize actions that would hinder their consolidation efforts.
- As these individuals have experienced more and more success in their efforts at consolidation (and associated lobbying), they have increased in boldness.
- As a consequence of *that*, they began engaging in behaviors that, although now legal, were not necessarily ethical or judicious—were, in fact, irresponsibly risky, and motivated by pathological greed rather than a concern for the society’s health (economic and otherwise).
- The result: Our current mess. The George W. Bush administration takes the prize for being most responsible for the current situation, but its roots go back at least to the “Jimmy” Carter administration.

The United States has never been an approximation of a democracy (in part because the Constitution was written so that it *wouldn’t* be!). And although there has been an extension of the franchise over time, our electoral system (for selecting legislators) is inherently flawed (to say nothing of being unConstitutional!—a point argued by John R. Low-Beer in a 1984 (!) article in *The Yale Law Journal*). Which fact is but one factor of several (technological developments being one of them) explaining why the elite has been able to increase its control over our society. To a degree, I might add, that the upcoming elections are little more than a diversion: both major parties are under the thumb of the elite (along with certain special interest groups—e.g., ones of a “religious” nature), and this situation is unlikely to change as a result of the November elections.

It’s conceivable that the new administration—but especially if Obama wins—will result in some improvement in the lot of the average American. But:

- The amount of improvement is unlikely to be substantial—whether “improvement” is defined in conventional, or in other, terms.

- The existing level of concentration in the economic sphere is likely to continue—and possibly even intensify.
- Elite control of the society will likely continue (and even expand); the society will *not* become more democratic; lost civil rights are *not* likely to be fully restored.
- “Global warming” is likely to continue—perhaps to the point where “runaway” becomes noticeable, with earth entering a period of rapid change such that extinctions occur on a massive scale, with the very real possibility that humankind will be among the species that go the way of the dinosaurs.

Perhaps the level of dissatisfaction is now high—and widespread—enough that the more intelligent and educated in our midst at least can recognize that the “change” we need at present is something of a more substantial nature than one of the White House’s occupant. Will recognize that what’s needed in our society (but not *just* in our society) is a change in *way of life*. Not a mere change in “lifestyle”—which is an individualistic concept that refers to individuals consciously changing their behavior patterns, but in the context of the existing institutional order. The sort of change that’s needed is one that goes beyond “lifestyle” change in that it’s focus is on *institutional* change. Such change would, of course, involve change in how individuals lived—just as “lifestyle” change has implications for institutional change. But if the emphasis is on “lifestyle” change, whatever institutional change occurs will be rather peripheral; whereas if the focus is on institutional change, there will be not only that sort of change, but “lifestyle” change as well—and of substantial enough nature to have significance.

If the change needed is *way of life* change, and that primarily involves institutional change, what is the basic principle to be followed? My answer is that a way of life needs to be established that is more in accord with our “design specifications” than is the case of the existing way of life. Use of the term “design specifications” here (inspired by George Edgin Pugh’s *The Biological Origin of Human Values*, 1977) suggests that humans once had such a way of life, but somehow “lost the way.” In fact, a fundamental assumption underlying my recommendations here is that prior to the Agricultural Revolution several thousand years ago there had occurred a co-development of humans as biological entities and the gatherer-hunter (“cynegetic” was the late Paul Shepard’s preferred term) way of life. That with that Revolution changes began to occur in way of life, whereas human biology remained basically unchanged—resulting in a growing *discrepancy* between the way of life (a) for which humans had become “designed” and (b) that which people actually lived. This discrepancy on the one hand became responsible for pathological behaviors (e.g., the emergence of a control mentality, and behaviors stemming from that mentality—these having institution-change implications), but on the other hand became responsible for, e.g., the prophetic movement (e.g., with the Hebrews) and the “utopian” tradition.

Much more discussion is warranted on this subject, but I eschew here because it would take us too far afield. Suffice it to say that if one wants more information on the subject, I suggest that one consult such books as *The Paleolithic Prescription* (by S. Boyd Eaton *et al.*, 1988), *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (by Paul Shepard, 1998), and *Evolving Health* (by Noel Boaz, 2002).

In using the above principle, my most basic assertion is that in “translating” it into something concrete we need to recognize that to establish a more “natural” way of life in our society, it will be necessary to “convert” our society into one dominated by small communities. Stated more realistically, we need to move our society in the *direction* of one of basically small communities—a sort of change that would simultaneously involve institutional change, geographical change, behavioral change, attitudinal change, etc. That “smallness” is a virtue has been argued at length by Kirkpatrick Sale in his massive (!) *Human Scale* (1980)—and I refer the reader to that book for elaboration. I do, however, believe it necessary to make a few points in support of this advocacy of a “society of small communities”:

- We humans are “designed” for a way of life whose setting is the small community (one that perhaps contains no more than about 500 individuals).
- Life in such a setting enables the practice of democracy. It can also enable ecologically-responsible living and a sane existence.
- If all of those living in a given community have a “stake” in the community, all are likely to have more security than they do in contemporary society (which at present has a huge unemployment problem—grossly underestimated by official statistics).
- Although such a society would not have the capability to produce the range of goods and services as the existing society, and although I would expect any given community to be relatively self-sufficient, (a) this does not mean that trade would not take place between communities—especially ones close to one another; and (b) much of what is produced in the existing society adds little if anything to our well-being, so that not having these things/services would do little to reduce our well-being—and might even contribute to well-being! (Needless to say, advertisers would disagree with this assertion—but, then, the future Good Society would have no need for advertising and advertisers!)
- Most of the disease “killers” in our society are “diseases of civilization.” Thus, as our society became less “civilized” as a consequence of a move in a communitarian direction, these diseases (along with, e.g., automobile accidents) would gradually decline in importance—and the “health industry” would be reduced to a mere skeleton for lack of need.
- Life in such a society might very well be conducive of creativity, innovation. In addition, it might enable people to develop their interests and talents—rather than forcing them to mold themselves in a direction useful to corporations.
- Those who might argue that a society of communities would provide an insecure existence because of the threat of terrorist attacks fail to recognize that (a) most of the world’s terrorists have been trained and armed by our government (!)—e.g., to fight the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s; and (b) insofar as a motive exists for terrorist activity, it is not the effect of an evil religion (i.e., Islam) but, rather, a response to our dastardly policies over the years—where “our” refers not only to the United States but other Western countries (whether our friends or enemies). (See, e.g., William Blum’s www.killinghope.org web site for evidence in support of this point.)

If, then, a change in our way of life is needed, and this must be “operationalized” by moving our society in a communitarian direction, two questions arise:

- What characteristics—institutional and other—should these communities have?
- What needs to be done to achieve this end? Put another way, what sequence of events must transpire to reach the desired goal?

I choose here to eschew addressing the first question any more than I already have, and will focus, rather, on the second question—because I believe that I can make a more original contribution relative to that question. In fact, in 1984 I published some ideas on the subject, and herein basically repeat what I wrote 24 years ago—because I “believe in” those ideas as strongly now as I did in 1984. I should note that my “plan” is dependent on the actions of private individuals—with the financial support of concerned citizens able to provide such support. The plan looks not at all to government—at any level.

Let me begin, by way of introduction, with a long quotation by Ralph Borsodi—this statement being the inspiration for the “strategy” I have developed to bring about societal system change:

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, cash-crop farmers specializing in one crop would have to abandon farming as a business and go back to it as a way of life. The packing-houses, mills, and canneries, not to mention the railroads, wholesalers, and retailers, which now distribute agricultural products[,] would find their business confined to the production and distribution of exotic foodstuffs. Food is our most important industry. A war of attrition, such as we [i.e., the Borsodi family] have been carrying on all alone, if extended on a large enough scale, would put the food industry out of its misery, for miserable it certainly is, all the way from the farmers who produce the raw materials[,] to the men, women, and children who toil in the canneries, mills, and packing-towns, and in addition reduce proportionately the congestion, adulteration, unemployment, and unpleasant odors to all of which the food industry contributes liberally.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, the textile and clothing industries, with their low wages, seasonal unemployment, cheap and shoddy products, would shrink to the production of those fabrics and those garments which it is impractical for the average family to produce for itself.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, undesirable and non-essential factories of all sorts would disappear[,] and only those which would be desirable and essential because they would be making tools and machines, electric light bulbs, iron and copper pipe, wire of all kinds, and the myriad of things which can best be made in factories, would remain to furnish employment to those benighted human beings who prefer to work in factories.

Domestic production, if enough people turned to it, would not only annihilate the undesirable and non-essential factory by depriving it of a market for its products. It would do more. It would release men and women from their present thralldom to the factory[,] and make them masters of machines instead of servants to them; it would end the power of exploiting them which ruthless, acquisitive, and predatory men now possess; it would free them for the conquest of comfort, beauty[,] and understanding.

--Ralph Borsodi, *Flight From the City* (1933)

If. If. If. Seventy years ago Ralph Borsodi identified the “Achilles heel” of a society, such as ours, which has an extensive division of labor: if a significant segment of the society’s population withdraws its support from the society (as consumers, as workers, and as taxpayers), that society will collapse, to be replaced by something quite different (if not necessarily better). Although Borsodi’s focus (in the above statement) was on how the actions of individuals and families, if enough were involved, could impact significantly on our *economy*, it should be obvious that those same actions would also significantly impact the *sociological, political, etc.*, institutions of our society—and the character of our culture. But not only did Borsodi *not* consider those possibilities (in any detail, at any rate); he presented no *blueprint* for “getting from here to there.” And that is a major deficiency indeed—a deficiency all too common in the writings of those who have developed “pictures” of the Good Society. It is, however, a deficiency which I propose to address in the discussion that follows.

My principal intent in the presentation below is to identify and discuss a scenario (or strategy, if you will) of societal system change. I wish not only to discuss that scenario, but indicate the thinking behind it—i.e., its rationale. For I believe that the scenario itself will be more readily accepted as sound and implementable if the “theory” underlying it is presented first. I should note, however, that it is not my intent here to convert others to my way of thinking. I present certain conclusions, and the thinking behind those conclusions, but make no attempt to “make believers” of any of my readers. Rather, I proceed on the assumption that my readers are already “believers” (or potentially so). If they are not, it will not hurt my feelings if they read no further. For the purposes of the presentation to follow I take the following as “givens,” as “truths”:

- Our existing way of life is unsustainable. As R. Buckminster Fuller stated several years ago (in *Utopia or Oblivion*), our society is a “utopian” one. But *not* in the sense of being an ideal society; rather, in the sense of being an *impossible* one. One that is *attainable*, yes, for it *does* exist; but *impossible* in being one that *cannot continue* indefinitely.
- Our way of life is unsustainable because we (especially we United States people—although the Chinese now “contribute” more CO₂ to the atmosphere than us) are pouring CO₂ (and other “greenhouse” gases) into the atmosphere at high absolute and *per capita* rates by virtue of our use of fossil fuels, and are thereby bringing about “global warming.” This could result in “flipping” (to use James Lovelock’s term); that is, it could result in Earth “suddenly” warming, eventually reaching a new temperature equilibrium, as the *negative* feedback mechanisms (which have been “working” to resist temperature change) give way to *positive* feedback mechanisms (which will “work” to *further* such change). The fact that the observatory directed by Dr. Charles Keeling on Mauna Loa in Hawaii shows that the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere is now increasing at an *increasing rate*, gives one reason for accepting what Dr. Lovelock has proposed as a *possibility* as being a *certainty*. For given that we have but one Earth to experiment with, it is better to err on the side of conservatism. If we ignore the warning signs about this (such as the recent severe hurricane seasons), and are wrong about not thinking of “global warming” as a threat, we may very well be contributing to the demise of our species. Most religions teach us that killing is wrong; we ought not, then, be culpable in the extinction of our species; we ought not to be helping our species commit suicide (and in the process kill many other species).

- Our high absolute and *per capita* “contribution” of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere will be reduced substantially through, and *only* through, societal system change of the right sort—which will especially reduce per capita *energy* usage *per se* substantially, not just fossil fuel usage. That is, the path to “salvation” is not primarily one involving the shift to alternate energy sources (although that will also be involved).
- If the right sort of societal system change were to occur, this would mean not only the (possible) “salvation” of our species, but an increase in well-being for most people. Two qualifiers are in order, however. First, it is by no means certain that humankind *can* be “saved” from extinction, even were decisive salvific steps taken immediately, and done so worldwide. Second, although it would appear necessary for United States citizens to provide the leadership regarding societal system change, it is necessary that such change occur not only in our society, but in other ones as well. It would not appear necessary, however, for societal system change to assume the same *form* elsewhere as it does here.

It is good to be in favor of human survival (a “pro-life” stance!) and a high level of well-being for all. Not only are such values consistent with the Jewish and Christian Bibles, but with the Scriptures of all major religions.

What these “givens” suggest are the following two questions:

- What would the Good Society look like—i.e., what would be its “shape”?
- How do we get from here to there?

Because (as I noted above) I want to focus here on the second question, I will answer the first by simply stating that the Good Society can be conceived as of a confederation of small eco-communities—cooperative eco-communities (CECs), and Ecological Company Towns (ECTs). A great number of details could be stated regarding that society, but herein I will state only that it would contain no large corporations (such as dominate our current society); but that I *cannot* be definitive on the matter of the Good Society’s “shape” because it would be the work of many hands.

The question I want to focus on here is “how to get from here to there,” and it will be useful to begin with a series of basic assumptions:

- The existing society is *by no means* the Good Society. (Indeed, a number of years ago Erich Fromm, in his *The Sane Society*, questioned the *sanity* of our society!)
- Societies are systems (whose individual components are interrelated).
- The driving force within a society is the prevailing mindset/worldview (MW). This is not to say, however, that one or more other (and even countervailing) MWs are not present within a society (and are even integral to the functioning of that society). For example, Thorstein Veblen, in one of his (typically) brilliant articles (and a subsequent book—*The Theory of Business Enterprise*), distinguished between industrial and pecuniary employments, argued that a *de facto* mentality was associated with the former and a *de*

jure mentality with the second, and in effect argued that both mentalities were integral to the functioning of United States society.

- If the prevailing MW within the United States's societal system can be characterized, briefly, as one of competitive individualism, the prevailing MW in the Good Society would be something distinctively different. Perhaps we could say that a "love God and neighbor" (LGN) MW would prevail in the Good Society. (Which implies, of course, that it is blasphemous lie currently to label the United States as a "Christian" society!)
- If the Good Society is thought of as a society of eco-communities, and an LGN MW is associated with that society, it follows that one cannot think of societal system change as involving *just* institutional change. Once we recognize this, the question arises: How do we get *both* institutional change (i.e., a shift to eco-communities as the key element of the Good Society's "institutional furniture") *and* mindset/worldview change (of the right sort)?

Conventional thinking has been dichotomous on this matter. It has stated either that what's necessary is to focus on "converting" individuals, one at a time, so that at some point in time a "critical mass" will be reached such that institutional change will occur virtually automatically; or that institutional change must occur first (via private and/or governmental efforts), and that as people live within a new institutional context they will develop an appropriate mindset/worldview.

Both of those views are "losing" ones, so far as I am concerned, however. The first one is naive in that it fails to recognize a truth, expressed brilliantly by Veblen (in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*) decades ago: "All classes are in a measure engaged in the pecuniary struggle, and in all classes the possession of the pecuniary counts towards the success and survival of the individual." In other words, so long as one is living within the context of the existing "institutional furniture," it is necessary for one to have a MW that enables one to at least *survive* within the society. If one is willing to occupy a lower rung within the existing organizational structure, one can survive with Good Society MW; but one cannot be *successful* in our society with such a MW (unless one inherits wealth). And the second view is naive in a "city on a hill" sense. That is, the second argument seems to assume that if you build an ideal community-society, "they will come." That because this community-society offers, so transparently, an ideal way of life, people will flock to it—and there won't even be a need to work out any strategy for getting a proliferation of such communities (to the point where the society becomes one of Ideal Communities).

The strategy that I have developed combines ideas from both of the above perspectives, and is based on the following specific assumptions:

- Most in our society lack a Good Society MW—for the simple reason that the "institutional furniture" of our society militates against this.
- Some in our society *do* have some semblance of a Good Society MW—at least in that they consciously *value* such a MW, even though they are unable to live by such a MW to the extent that they would like.

- It is people in *that* category who must form the vanguard in creating the Good Society.
- Those in that category are usefully (for the purpose of my strategy) placed into two subgroups: (1) retirees (i.e., people with incomes independent of jobs); and (2) middle-aged adults with entrepreneurial skills.

The strategy I have developed sees the process of change in terms of stages (“waves”); and in terms of some key concepts of migration theory, the “waves” involve, successively, pull, push, pull, push, and “drag.” Here (briefly) are the “waves” I envision:

- Wave One consists of retirees willing to create Cooperative Eco-Communities (CECs) for themselves and other retirees.
- Wave Two involves retirees who are attracted to CECs more for “push” than “pull” reasons—but the point is that they *are* willing to move to a CEC (perhaps one that they have helped design/build). They may be willing to move because they don’t feel safe in their neighborhood, because they can no longer afford to live where they are, etc.
- Wave Three consists of middle-aged adults interested in building a society of eco-communities (perhaps including some Ecological Company Towns [ECTs]), and having entrepreneurial skills. That is, people able to create businesses (ones appropriate for the Good Society, it must be emphasized) able to attract working class people as employees.
- Wave Four would include people who, prior to moving to an eco-community, would be categorized as “working class, but who would lose that “status” upon moving to an eco-community. For even an ECT would be relatively democratic in its governance; even an ECT would be relatively egalitarian sociologically. As with Wave Two, those attracted to an eco-community during this “wave” would be responding to “push” factors (such as inadequate income, the feeling of inferiority imposed on most in the existing society); but, again, the point is that they *do* decide to move to an eco-community. And in doing so they would find that their MW begins to become more of a Good Society one as they begin to acquire a different way of life. (The same would occur, of course, with those associated with Wave Two.)
- I assume that some of those associated with eco-communities would be “evangelists” in that they would be working actively for a proliferation of eco-communities. I also assume that those involved with The Movement would, by virtue of being in the Movement, be withdrawing their purchasing activity, their labor, and their tax support from the Larger Society—for I assume that the communities comprising the emerging New Order would be striving to make that New Order as self-contained as possible, especially in economic terms. This means that at a certain point in the development of the New Order (relative to the existing one), those remaining in the Old Order, having lost their economic support, would be forced either to migrate from the United States to some hierarchical society dominated by an elite, or to migrate to an eco-community. The latter movement would constitute Wave Five. Of course, those not in the New Order

might encourage migration to the United States, with the hope of exploiting migrants (as they are doing now). But insofar as that occurred, leaders in The Movement should strive to divert migrants to eco-communities (rather than attempting to “close the borders,” even though they might now have control over our political institutions).

In concluding this discussion, I should make clear that I do not necessarily regard a society of eco-communities as either *possible*, or even entirely *desirable*, if possible. I don’t think it *possible* to create a society that consists *just* of eco-communities, because I see the prevailing MW as powerful—and because I believe that there are societal forces operating which are beyond our control, ones which are not necessarily favorable to the Good Society. (In fact, there have been times when I have been convinced that Gaia was “determined” to rid Earth of that pollutant—that cancer—known as humankind, and have interpreted world history as an inexorable march toward catastrophe.)

I don’t think such a society entirely *desirable*, first, because it would have limited productive capability; and, second, because it would not be able to defend itself against aggressive foreign societies. Nevertheless, I believe it *useful* to hold the ideal of a society of eco-communities in mind, for this can energize us in working for societal system change. (As the Bible puts it, without a vision the people perish.) And societal system change, I am convinced, is *necessary* if humankind is to have a future; societal system change *of the right sort*, it goes without saying—and not only on our shores, but *elsewhere* as well.

It is, of course, possible that humankind is doomed, that nothing we do will “save” us. But we must not accept that verdict, else we certainly *will* be doomed. I am willing to do my part in trying to prevent the demise of our species, but my abilities to contribute to The Movement are not very substantial. During the nineteenth century there was a tremendous amount of interest in the nature of the Good Society, but little progress was made in achieving that goal. Perhaps the time was not *then* “ripe” for the emergence of the Good Society, but now is. Let’s hope so!!

Friendship: An Alternate View

James B. Gray

I recently listened to a lecture on friendship, and although I agree with much of what the speaker said, my complaint is that the lecture was too narrow in its scope. The speaker began by noting that having friends is good for one's physical and mental health—and quoted statistics in support of that point. He noted, however, that his investigation of the subject turned up the (what was to him) surprising fact that few members of our society have many close friends—and that, in fact, this number has been on the decline. (If my memory is correct, he stated that the typical American now has but about two close friends.)

Next, the speaker addressed the question of why researchers believe this situation exists, and brought out the following points:

- Unlike Europe, we are a rather new country with a pioneering past. Individuals and families struck out on their own in the direction of the frontier; and those who homesteaded under the federal government's homesteading program tended to settle on isolated homesteads—a situation that militated against establishing friendships, because of non-existent neighbors.
- Going back even farther in time, many of those who migrated to these shores had been living under situations of oppression/exploitation—so that they had learned to be suspicious of others, and had become convinced that if they were to better their lot they would need to rely on their own resources.

The implication of these first two points is that certain attitudes had been acquired by our ancestors that had gotten transmitted—inadvertently, if not consciously—down the generations, and were still having an impact on how people were interacting with others. Related to these historical factors, but one currently operating, is that:

- The dominant “mindset” that has developed in this society is one that is individualistic and competitive. That is, people tend to perceive themselves as isolated individuals, and to put themselves first (or at least become convinced that this is what they are doing). And, on the other hand, rather than feeling solidarity with their fellow citizens, they tend to perceive others in terms of the categories of superiority and inferiority. They are bothered that others are superior to them—especially in terms of wealth—but gain some sense of satisfaction in the “knowledge” that some others are inferior to them. (Which reminds me of the fact that I recall once talking with a man who relayed to me that he liked to drink at bars frequented by blacks because this gave him a feeling of superiority. A peculiar sort of racist!)

Two societal characteristics were mentioned as having relevance for why our society has a “friendship problem”:

- We have become an increasingly urban society, and this has tended to fracture our relationships with others: those who are our relatives are not the people we work with nor even live by as neighbors; the people we associate with at church are a different group again, etc. Urban life tends to make our relationships with others superficial; the urban

environment, in fact, makes difficult the establishment of close relationships with others: although urban living brings us in contact with a great many others, that contact tends to be of a formal, “business-like,” and therefore superficial nature. And even though an urban environment provides an opportunity to find like-minded others with whom one might be able to establish close relationships, there is something about the urban environment (or is this a *societal* phenomenon?) that discourages this from happening to any great degree.

- Technological developments seem to have worked to isolate people rather than bring them together. It’s true, e.g., that traffic jams are more the result of people’s desire to drive to work than take public transit, but it seems that technological developments have simply fed that sort of desire rather than combat it.

Finally, another factor that was mentioned was personal traits, with two being mentioned:

- People differ in personalities—in that some are much more “outgoing” than others. Meaning, then, that introverted people, because they have difficulty establishing relationships with others, tend to have few friends, whereas extroverted people tend to have many friends. (Whether those friends are “close” ones is, of course, another matter.)
- Some people are so lacking in common sense (or is it good “breeding”?) that they don’t know how to interact with others in a manner that might lead to the establishment of friendships. For example, they are more than willing to express their views on religious and/or political matters, and make the mistake of expressing their views in what is close to a belligerent manner: “I believe such and such, and if you don’t also have those beliefs, you are ignorant, stupid, or both.” Such an approach to conversations is not, of course, likely to earn one friends—except for others who share one’s views. But even in *that* case, the fact that no two people think alike means that friendships established between such people are likely to be short-lived. (Related to this, many Protestant churches have split apart on the basis of what, to an outside observer, would appear to be rather trivial matters.)

After the speaker in question had discussed why having friendships was important, and had identified some of the factors that help explain the existence of the problem, he asked: What can one do to increase the number of one’s friends, and to deepen the relationships that one already has? I will not repeat what he said in this part of his lecture, because what I want to make note of here is that the speaker made himself out to be a typical American in addressing this question. That is, his answer to the problem was couched in *self-help* language. I do not wish to suggest here that such an approach is lacking in value, please note. Rather, I simply wish to point out that this is an *individualistic* approach—a particular individualistic approach at that. For, after all, there are *two* rather different individualistic approaches in this case:

- What can *I* do to gain more friends for *myself*?
- What can *I* do to enable *others* to have more friends?

The first orientation is *self-regarding* (ostensibly, at any rate), the other orientation *other-regarding*. Note, however, that although these two orientations are seeming opposites, they need not be. For if one adopts the second orientation, one will proceed to identify others who need

friends, and in helping them gain friends may *oneself* become one of those friends. On the surface this is a purely altruistic act on one's part. But it need not be *just* that, for if oneself becomes a friend to others who need friends, not only will those others benefit from the friendships, but oneself as well. Some of us know this not only from our reading in the psychological literature, but from personal experience as well.

What I am saying here, then, is that the individualistic approach used by the speaker in question is not one that is inherently bad; rather, what was bad about his discussion was use of the first approach at the expense of the second one. He could have spoken as one whose orientation was altruistic but, rather, did so using a selfish perspective. We should, however, not be too critical on this score given the fact that an attitude of selfishness is so pervasive in our society—and so reinforced by advertising—that it is difficult to *avoid* acquiring such a “mindset.” Even if one attends a church on a regular basis, I might add! (Not a good advertisement for Christian churches!)

Next, however, I would like to “shift gears” somewhat by addressing a question that could not have even occurred to the speaker I have been referring to above: If in our society there is a need for people to have a few close friends (a need that is not satisfied very well), does it follow that this need is a biological one? Stated another way: Is the need for friendship a *societal* one or, rather, is it a *biological* one?

I will answer this question by asserting the former—and *not* the latter. And the first point I would make is that to say that having a few good friends (in our society) is important is in effect to say that having some close friends will help one *cope*. And *that* is to say that in our society coping is a problem. Which it *is*—a fact about our society that we are reluctant to admit. Indeed, one could argue (as have individuals such as Philip Slater) that our societal system requires, for its very continuation, “warped” individuals with diagnosable mental illnesses. Which implies, from an *individual* perspective, that if one is highly neurotic, one has the best chance to succeed in our society; and that if one is a psychologically-healthy individual, not only will find life in the society difficult, but one may very well be driven mad by life in the society.

Not a very comforting commentary on our society, but an accurate one. One suggesting that if we are truly interested in the health—mental and physical—of people in our society, we will recognize (with Erich Fromm) that in a very real sense our *society* is insane, so that what's needed is to change our society. I will not in this essay make any recommendations as to *how* our society should be changed, but *would* like to point out that in those societies that have existed in the past that have offered a more “natural” way of life, deep friendships have not been commonplace. In such societies individuals have interacted well with others (especially others within the immediate group), but have tended not to have “close” friends. Why have they not needed “close” friends? In these societies coping has not been a problem—and the basic reason for that may be that children have been raised in such societies with abundant body contact. The importance of prolonged physical contact with others (especially the mother) has long been known to have important implications for the development of good mental health. And one effect of that contact, evidently, is to lessen the need for the development of close friendships with others. It is, of course, that close contact with the mother during a child's early years may decrease one's need for close contact with others later, but such appears to be the case.

The existing societal system militates against the development of healthy relationships with others, but I would like to assert here that participation in a New Word Fellowship (see my [Worship](#))—even while one is still living in the existing society—can not only help one cope in the here-and-now. It can help one establish friendships with others. And the establishment of those friendships—along with New Word Fellowship (NeWF) participation—can lead to ideas regarding how to bring about societal system change.

In my “Worship” I discuss an array of consequences that can result from NeWF participation. If I did not give (enough) attention to the matter of friendship in that paper, I hereby atone for that shortcoming by now adding that consequence to the list. Not that NeWF participation will result in the formation of deep friendships: that is neither likely nor necessary, nor even desirable. But the point is that such participation can result in increased well-being; and in that it may result in ideas for societal system change, the implementation of such ideas may result in humankind’s “salvation” from extinction (resulting from the “runaway” associated with “global warming”). Thus, participation in a NeWF has much to recommend itself!

Will the Frog Jump?

James B. Gray

Whether or not it has scientific merit, there is a frog story that has relevance for the essay that follows.

The story I have in mind is of a frog placed in a pan of water, the pan then being placed on a stove over low heat. As the water's temperature slowly rises, the frog's body will adapt to the increasing heat, but this process of adaptation will not continue indefinitely. At some point the temperature will become so high that the frog's body can no longer adapt—and the frog will die if it remains in the pan. Before that point is reached, however, the frog will sense that a danger point is being reached, and will attempt to jump from the pan. Unfortunately, by the time that “realization” is achieved, the frog has been rendered incapable of jumping from the pan—and thereby perishes in short order.

What's the relevance of this story? Our society, I would suggest, can be usefully compared to the frog in the story:

- Income disparities have increased in our society to the extent that our income distribution has come to resemble that of a “third-world” country: we are fast approaching a two-class society consisting of the very rich and “everybody else.”
- More and more of us are seeing our incomes increase but slightly over time—or even flatten.
- If that's not bad enough, most of us are finding our “real” incomes decreasing because incomes have increased little, if at all, while expenses have been rising—for gasoline, for food, for medical care, etc.
- Also, many of us are feeling very insecure—not because we have a fear of terrorist attacks, however, but because we are ill-employed, under-employed, or even *unemployed*.
- Not only has it become increasingly difficult to maintain a “decent” standard of living; we look into the future with the fear that we won't be able to send our children to college/university.
- Our fear for the future is compounded by the fact that we see our leaders doing little to address the problem of environmental degradation—including (and perhaps especially) the threat posed by “global warming.” What kind of a future—if any—are we handing down to our children, many of us are wondering; with some of us being so burdened with a sense of responsibility over this matter that we are on the verge of regretting that we had children.

I'm sure that my list of current concerns is not complete, and that any reader would be able to add to the list. My point here, however, is not to see how complete a list I can create but to

identify some of the major concerns that are on the minds of Americans currently. I write these words on the day after (October 16, 2008) the last debate between John McCain and Barack Obama, thus am fully aware of the fact that many in our society tacitly assume that if change is to come to our society, it must come via a change in the political administration. There will, of course, be a change in administration, given that George W. Bush is a “lame duck” (one of the kinder labels one can apply to the man!). Still, the next administration will be either a Republican one (as the current one is) or a Democratic one; and in either case drastic change is not likely to be associated with the next administration—whether it is Democratic (which seems most likely) or Republican.

I wish that more Americans were able to think of alternatives beyond just the two alternatives of “Republican administration” and “Democratic administration.” I wish that more Americans knew more about the history of their country, and in particular were aware of the fact that especially during the 19th century a great diversity of societal ideas were being discussed by the educated—and even not-so-educated—public. There were discussions of Socialism, Anarchism, Syndicalism, and a great number of societal philosophies. Ideas regarding how our future society might “look” were presented in dozens of “utopian” novels—Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* being just the most well-known of these. Prior to the Civil War a New York City newspaper was popularizing the communitarian ideas of French writer Charles Fourier, and thousands of readers were paying attention. In short, the idea of *societal system change* was being given serious attention—and not just by a few “intellectuals”—and a great variety of ideas were being presented and discussed.

No more, however. Indeed, it almost seems that thinking people today are reluctant to bring up the subject for fear that they will be accused of being “subversives.” Our tolerance for “deviant” ideas seems to have declined—perhaps because the elite has obtained an increasing grip on our society, and has fostered such a mindset. But whether or not that explanation “holds water,” the fact of the matter is that discussion of “change” these days tends to occur within a very narrow band: most of us think that the only two avenues open to us are Republican administration, on the one hand, or Democratic administration, on the other. This is an unfortunate fact, but a fact nonetheless—and, therefore, a fact that must be “worked around.”

Fortunately, that fact *can* be worked around, and the frog analogy that I used above gives us the clue we need for doing so. The key here is to recognize that the analogy that I made between a frog in a pan being warmed and our society in its present situation is a flawed one. It’s true that the analogy holds in the sense that both the frog and our society consist of individual parts. But the parts of which a frog consists are *physically* connected whereas such is not the case of the basic parts that comprise our society—individual people. The members of our society *are* connected, of course, but they are not *physically* connected. As a consequence, those “parts” are *able* to act independently. Not only are they *able* to act independently; because they differ in knowledge, intelligence, beliefs, values, experiences, etc. they are *inclined* to act differently. And although it’s true that, generally speaking, societal thinking tends to occur within a very narrow band today (as I noted above), it’s also true that some variation exists.

Enough variation, I will add, to be of significance; enough variation to give our society a chance that our goose will not be cooked. Or, to keep our analogy pure, to ensure (so far as possible) that our frog will not be killed by the rising heat.

Given that the parts of our *society*, unlike those of a frog, are capable of acting independently, and that at least some in our society are able to escape the conformist pressures that exist in our society, there is the possibility that some of those in the latter category will perceive the need of jumping from the pan—and proceed to do so. What might “jumping from the pan” mean in concrete terms? My earlier discussion above suggests that there is a “crying need” today for societal system change, so that the “jumping” to which I am referring here would involve actions designed to contribute to that end.

But what sorts of actions? The most obvious sort of action would be to follow the lead of the Amish and in effect make an exit from the Larger Society in favor of a basically self-sufficient sort of existence. And if not literal self-sufficiency (e.g., becoming a modern “homesteader”), then *community*-sufficiency. That is, just as the Amish don’t go out and establish isolated farms but, rather, establish settlements/congregations, so could moderns establish communities that strive to be relatively “community-sufficient.” Although most Americans are not aware of it, the fact is that already a number of such communities exist in the United States and Canada, and a few organizations exist that connect such communities. Granted that this sort of “jumping” does not have much appeal for most Americans; still, it *is* an option.

Likely there are many other ways of “jumping,” however, and I would like to propose an *institution* that might (for one thing) aid in the generation of ideas along that line. Elsewhere (see my [Worship](#)) I have proposed the creation of New Word Fellowships (NeWFs), thus I will not in this essay elaborate on that institution—except to say that it addresses one of the major problems that I perceive in our society. What is that problem? The lack of “interactional institutions” that foster healthy interactional patterns. So much of the interaction that occurs in our society is one-way: lecturers speaking to students or others; ministers/priests “sermonizing” at congregants; individuals on television speaking to an audience sitting in their homes; etc. That is, we have certain formalities regarding communication, but those formalities tend to involve one person speaking and others merely listening (except that in some contexts people can ask questions).

When it comes to two-way communication, we generally lack any *institutionalized* ways of engaging in the communication. Those of us who have seen *Dances With Wolves* were exposed to a council meeting participated in by a small group of Native Americans, and were thereby made aware of a non-typical way of communicating with others. (The NeWF (that I describe in “Worship”) was, in fact, in part inspired by this Native American practice.) Basically, however, we are unaware of alternatives for the simple reason that they don’t exist to any significant extent!

Two-way communication in our society usually takes the form of *conversations*—and this is not surprising: after all, this mode of communication is very “natural.” From *that* fact it does not follow, however, that it would not be wise to introduce some *institutionalized* modes of two-way communication. For if two-way communication is restricted to conversations, certain negative consequences can (and do) occur:

- Individuals tend to become rigid in their thinking. They tend to gain a psychological investment in certain beliefs and values, and resist changing either.

- A group consisting of rigid-thinking individuals is likely to experience conflict among its members—such that the group’s existence may become tenuous, perhaps resulting in a splitting off of certain individuals from the group. If splitting off is not possible for whatever reasons, group tensions may flare up in violence—with injuries, and even deaths.
- The presence of conflict implies that members of the group will tend to restrict their contact with other members of the group as much as possible—meaning that they will not get to know each other well. Nor will they develop much trust in one another—and certainly will not develop a liking one for another, or even respect, for that matter.
- The lack of harmonious relationships within the group will also hinder learning (from one another) by individual members of the group. And also hinder the development of new ideas—i.e., will hinder creativity.

Recognizing the fact that if two-way communication is limited to conversations a number of negative effects are likely to arise, I have proposed the NeWF—and in “Worship” list a number of positive consequences that can result from NeWF participation. I earlier referred to the possibility of some individuals jumping from the pan, and engaging in activities that might result in our collective “salvation” (defined in the broadest possible terms). I would hope that some of those “jumpers” would perceive the possibilities that lie with NeWFs, and would begin initiating some—and working for their proliferation. I will grant that we need different kinds of “jumpers,” but surely among them are those who perceive the potentials that lie with NeWFs. Whether such individuals are attached to existing religions or not is not at issue here; for “salvation” is a concept that transcends the religion realm. Indeed—and ironically—it is perhaps more realistic to look for “salvation” today among the secularists in our society than the religious!

Toward More “Natural” Interaction Patterns

Alton C. Thompson

A certain “argument” underlies the discussion that follows; therefore, it is appropriate to begin by presenting the basics of that argument:

- Prior to the Agricultural Revolution (which occurred several thousand years ago) a rather close “fit” existed between the way(s) of life³⁷¹ that human lived and their biological natures. This means, e.g., that humans had (prior to that Revolution) become “designed” (via the operation of various selection mechanisms) for receiving the *stimuli* associated with their way(s) of life, as well as for engaging in the *behaviors* associated with that way(s) of life.
- Because of this “fit,” a high level of well-being (physical and mental) existed almost universally,³⁷² and pathological behaviors were at a minimum. (The implication here, of course, is the principle that well-being and “normal” behavior can exist with any given species if, and only if, a “fit” exists between members of the species as biological entities and their way of life. If, e.g., animals are removed from their natural habitat and placed in a zoo, they will suffer—even in a well-designed zoo; for even such a zoo cannot fully duplicate the natural habitat.)
- The Agricultural Revolution brought a change in the well-being situation: because, during and after this Revolution, way(s) of life began to change,³⁷³ whereas human biology remained relatively unchanged over time, a “discrepancy” arose. In other words, the “fit” that had existed previously between way(s) of life and biological characteristics (e.g., “needs”) began to become increasingly lessened. Increasingly it became the case that people were:
 - Exposed to stimuli for which they had not been designed.
 - Less frequently exposed to those stimuli for which they had been designed.

371 The components of “way of life” of particular interest here are (1) activities associated with the acquisition of food, and (2) living arrangements (e.g., whether it involves solitary or communal living).

372 This does not mean that deaths did not occur (from “natural” causes, from accidents, from natural disasters—and even from interpersonal violence); those unavoidable tragedies aside, however, well-being was not only pervasive, but at a high level.

373 For thousands of years the change was rather slow (although forced relocations were often traumatic for those moved, and the trauma had significant implications for their well-being as well as behavior). With the Industrial Revolution (beginning around 1750 in England), however, this sort of change started to occur—at an ever-increasing rate, in fact.

- Forced to engage in behaviors for which they had not been designed.
- Unable to engage in those activities for which they had become designed—at least to the degree that nature had “intended.”

These changes not only brought about a deterioration in the well-being situation, but precipitated pathological behaviors—which, in turn, have had ill-being implications for those affected

- The situation today is one where ill-being is not only widespread (from a world standpoint³⁷⁴)—with consequent pathological behavior—but our very existence is threatened: by the possibility of nuclear annihilation, on the one hand, and “global warming,”³⁷⁵ on the other.
- Our problems will not be solved via decisions made by the leaders of political institutions; nor will technology play a decisive role in solving our problems. Given that the fundamental factor underlying our problems is a way of life that is “unnatural,” our “salvation”—if such can be achieved (and there are no guarantees here)—lies with *societal system change*, in the direction of restoring a way of life more in accord with our “design specifications.” The alternative—changing our biology to fit our current way of life—is defective not only in that it ignores the fact that our way of life involves environmental degradation, and is therefore life-threatening; changing our biology would involve the destruction of our “humanness.” Indeed, changing our biology might not even “work” in the sense that it might result in defective beings incapable of surviving—or surviving in any way deemed satisfactory.
- Restoration of a more “natural” way of life is *possible*—the only question being whether or not it is already too late for “salvation” to be achieved.

As I have developed—and published—a strategy for societal system change, I will not comment on that matter here. What I do, rather, is to identify some of the specific changes in way of life³⁷⁶ that should be made during the process of societal transformation. I choose for my

³⁷⁴ Much of the ill-being (including starvation and disease) that exists in “third-world” countries today is a result of behaviors by imperialistic Western countries (Spain, Portugal, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Germany) over the past few centuries.

³⁷⁵ Which might reach a point where the negative feedback mechanisms that have been “working” to maintain stasis become replaced with positive feedback mechanisms—which will result in an acceleration of change, such that earth will become so changed that human life is rendered impossible.

³⁷⁶ I might note that the topics of (1) the implications of The Discrepancy, (2) the nature of a more “natural” society, and (3) how to get there have received little thoughtful attention to date. The first topic was first brought to the attention of the reading public about a century ago by Thorstein Veblen—who, however, contributed little to the topic. More recently important works have been written that deal with the implications of The Discrepancy for diet and disease. But beyond those two topics there is a basic paucity of thinking and research. Therefore, what I write here about interaction should be understood more as the offering of hypotheses than of recommendations based on extensive solid research.

specific topic that of human *interaction*. Given that choice, it would be well to begin the essay by presenting a classification relative to interaction:

- Communicative Interaction
 - Verbal Interaction
 - ❖ One-way
 - ❖ Two-way
 - Non-verbal Interaction
- Physical Interaction
 - Sexual Interaction
 - Non-Sexual Interaction

Communicative interaction can be either verbal or non-verbal, the verbal type being either one-way or two-way. *One-way communicative interaction* may involve just two people or many, but in all cases involves one person speaking³⁷⁷ to another without (usually) the hearer in the exchange also being a speaker. Implicit in this type of communication is that the speaker is a superior in some sense, the hearer(s) an inferior(s). Thus, examples of one-way communication include a master speaking to his slave or servant, a professor delivering a lecture to students,³⁷⁸ a minister/priest giving a sermon/homily to congregants, a president delivering a State of the Union address to a television audience, etc.

Two-way communicative interaction may involve just two individuals, or may involve a small group. If the interaction is occurring within a group, the interaction may involve (virtually) everyone in the group (as with a book-discussion group) or, alternatively, may involve subgroups within a larger group (as with a holiday party of a large company). If everyone is expected to be involved in the communication, the implication is that all parties to the interaction are perceived as equals; and the “rule” that everyone be a participant implies that the group itself is small—for it must be under the circumstances. If, though, the two-way communication is to occur within a large group, the implication is that the members of the group are not necessarily perceived as equals and (therefore) there is no expectation that interaction will involve all members of the group—except in the sense that everyone will be involved in the interactions of one of the subgroups that forms.

Communicative interaction involving a group can be extremely variable:

³⁷⁷ I herein give “speaking” a broad meaning so that it includes, e.g., sending an e-mail message to another or others. Also, the “hearer” may be in the physical presence of the “speaker,” but need not be; e.g., the “speaker” may be a television newscaster, with the “hearers” being people hearing him/her, in their homes, over their television sets.

³⁷⁸ In this case the asking of questions by students may be permitted, and even encouraged.

- It may or may not involve the use of a regular meeting place, with certain specific times established for meetings.
- It may or may not involve the establishment of rules to guide the interaction process (such as Roberts's Rules of Order).
- Meetings may or may not have a specific purpose (e.g., simply socializing vs. reaching a collective decision).
- Meetings may involve just verbal communication or may also involve other activities such as rituals, prayers, readings, music, singing, dancing, sharing a meal

Because of this variation it is difficult to make generalizations regarding two-way communication—except that where two-way communication occurs, the underlying assumption is that those involved in a given two-way interaction group perceive one another as equals.

Non-verbal communicative interaction involves the reading of another's "body language." Generally, the "message" associated with one's body language is unintended, but this is not always the case. And whether or not one intends a certain message with one's body language, that message may be misinterpreted by the "recipient(s)" of the message. Thus, although a certain level of "truthfulness" is often said to be associated with one's body language, whereas deception is often said to be associated with verbal statements, these claims should not be taken as "gospel."³⁷⁹ For a body to deliver a message to another, the "messenger" needs to be visible to the "receiver." This can occur either with the latter physically present with reference to the former, or with the former being visible on, e.g., television. One would assume, however, that a message can be more clearly conveyed if the receiver is in the physical presence of the messenger.

Physical interaction is not, strictly speaking, a form of interaction that is mutually exclusive with communicative interaction—in that physical interaction is usually communicative, if only at an unconscious level. This type of interaction is, however, usefully distinguished from communicative interaction in that it involves direct physical contact. There is, of course, physicality involved with "body language," but neither of the two types of interaction identified under the heading Communicative Interaction involves direct physical contact. In addition, a distinction between these two types of interaction is that physical interaction usually (but not always) involves physical contact between just two people, whereas communicative interaction may involve just two individuals, but frequently involves many more. Also, although communicative interaction can be thought of as always involving individuals capable of verbal communication (even in cases where "body language" is involved), with physical interaction one of the individuals involved in the interaction may be incapable of verbal communication (e.g., a mother caring for a very young child). Finally, if the interaction involves individuals, both of whom are capable of verbal communication, at times the physical interaction will be one-sided. That is, at times the interaction will be forced by one of the individuals involved in the interaction (meaning non-consent on the part of the other individual)—the most common example of this being rape.

³⁷⁹ For example, given two receivers in the presence of a given messenger, it is not likely that both will interpret the latter's message in precisely the same way.

If sexual contact between individuals (of opposite sex) is important for a group, in that it is necessary for the group's continuation, non-sexual contact also plays a role in that it has importance for proper physical and psychological development. The former type of interaction involves adults, the latter type may involve adults, but more commonly involves adult-child pairs. In both cases the basis for the interaction occurring appears to be biologically-based "drives." That is, in the case of sexual interaction (which may vary in degree, from mild "petting" to intercourse) the basis for the activity is attraction for the other person, followed up by a desire for sexual contact—which desire may then actually result in physical activity. In the case of non-sexual physical contact, it's not a matter of the mother being attracted to the child but, rather, an instinctual "drive" to care for the child—which care involves holding the child. Sexual interaction involves an unconscious desire to *possess* the other (which, if not felt by both parties, can result in rape), and in many cases arises from a drive to exercise power over the other. Non-sexual interaction, in contrast, involves a desire to *care* for the other. This means that sexual interaction is always of a *selfish* nature³⁸⁰ whereas non-sexual interaction is usually of an *altruistic* nature. In both cases, however, it is biological promptings which motivate the behavior.

Having identified different categories of interaction and offered some commentary on them, we are now in a position to ask: What constitutes healthy interaction? What sort of interaction can be thought of as in accord with human nature; and therefore in the design of the Good Society what interaction goals should be established? That is, how should we characterize the interaction patterns that we would associate with the Good Society—a society that would not only provide a high level of well-being to its members, but would also enable them to live in a manner compatible with the environment (local, regional, national, international)?

It would seem—on the basis of my introductory remarks—that the relevant benchmark to use in addressing these questions is humans as they existed just prior to the Agricultural Revolution. And although our knowledge of those people is limited (being derived primarily from archeological findings), the fact that these peoples were gatherer-hunters allows us to use contemporary such groups as "representatives" of the long-dead peoples who lived prior to the Agricultural Revolution. Modern gatherer-hunters (or "cynegetic" peoples—to use the term preferred by Paul Shepard)—many of them, at any rate—have had some contact with more "advanced" peoples, and are therefore not a perfect substitute for ancient gatherer-hunters. Still, they are a useful surrogate for the ancients, even if they must be "used" with caution.

A point that must be emphasized regarding ancient gatherer-hunters, and their modern counterparts, is that although one group had much in common with other like groups, by no means can these groups be viewed as mere "clones" one of another. Variation did and does exist between the groups. In part the "societal" variation can be explained on the basis of environmental variation. Likely, however, if one were to "hold environment constant" (by

380 Ironically, the selfishness "needs" of both individuals may be satisfied in the encounter. In the case of rape, however, those needs are satisfied for only one of the individuals, with the other individual left traumatized by the experience. Indeed, in the case of rape the perpetrator may be less motivated by inborn drives than by behavioral tendencies that have a societal basis. That is, the fact that one lives in a "sick" society that makes difficult the satisfaction of one's needs may be the contributing factor in why one chooses to rape another person.

examining just the groups living in a single type of environment), one would still find variation—and how is one to explain that variation? I will eschew any attempt to explain such variation here in favor of simply noting that insofar as way of life varied between groups having the same environment—and given that each of those ways of life must be labeled as “natural”—the concept of a “natural” way of life becomes a rather problematic one. It would seem, then, that we must search for commonalities between cynegetic groups, and restrict claims of “naturalness” to them.

Using this principle, and beginning our commentary with the matter of communicative interaction, it would seem that the first point to make is that one-way communication was/is rare with cynegetic groups. Presumably this reflected the fact that relative egalitarianism existed—and that *that* existed for the simple reason that small-group living was universal, and that sort of living did not permit a hierarchical arrangement (except that age was the basis for respect and deference). In addition to the restraining nature of group size, it’s likely that a genetic character had developed (via the operation of sexual selection) that favored cooperative behavior and an egalitarian attitude. One-way communication may have occurred occasionally with cynegetic groups (e.g., an elder telling stories or conveying information); likely, however, the far more common type of communication was two-way. Non-verbal communication also occurred, of course; indeed, from an historical standpoint it’s virtually certain that that form of communication developed before there was verbal communication. Of primary interest here, however, is verbal communication; and it would seem that the two basic comments we can make about such communication with cynegetic groups is that it was (1) two-way and (2) harmonious.

Likely most of the two-way communication that occurred with cynegetic groups was of an informal nature, and occurred while engaging in “economic” activities. The communication associated with hunting may have emphasized coordinating the activities to be engaged in, and because of that may have involved certain individuals arising to (temporary) leadership positions. That is, a leader may have arisen for a particular hunt, and that individual may have developed the basic plan, and delivered orders for the others to carry out. “Suggestions” might, however, be a more apt term here than “orders.” With gathering activities, in contrast, the conversation that occurred may have focused on topics other than the “economic” activity being engaged in—for the simple reason that little or no planning and coordination were required for that activity. What implications these differences in the nature of communication (between hunting and gathering) might have is something that I do not comment on here—for the simple reason that I can’t think of any off hand!

An important fact about cynegetic peoples that has relevance for a discussion of communication is that the thinking of such people tends to be of an *idiographic* nature. That is, it is particularistic (“factual”) in nature, and focused on the immediate surround and the here-and-now. What everyone has in their heads is “knowledge,” and that knowledge is of a particularistic nature. And because the knowledge of one person basically coincides with that of another (except that knowledge tends to increase over time), there is little basis for disagreement. Hence, the nature of knowledge in such a society conduces harmonious two-way communication. Stories (“myths”) are also a part of a group’s “knowledge,” these serving an explanatory role, while also being entertaining, and stimulating of the imagination. Thus, these stories form more of a role than simply “filling out a day.” In addition, stories help give a feeling of solidarity to the group—as do rituals, dances, etc. that the group develops and utilizes.

The modern mind is different in that so much in it is other than particularistic knowledge: there is nomothetic knowledge (generalizations, theories), historical “knowledge,” and ideology. The nomothetic knowledge may not provide a basis for controversy (although this is certainly not true of the theory of evolution—however that may be conceived). There are, however, different views as to what happened historically (including with professional historians!), and are conflicting ideologies. Thus, there is the basis for disagreements between people based on the fact that what’s in one person’s head may differ sharply from what’s in another’s head. What I’m referring to here is not only the fact that the sort of knowledge in, e.g., a lawyer’s head differs substantially from what’s in a physician’s head (so that in not having much in common, they may have difficulty communicating with one another). More basically, I’m referring here to the fact that on some given subject there may be differences in “knowledge.” Now given that if one views one’s ideas as constituting “knowledge,” this suggests that one views it as having a high degree of certainty, this means that if one’s “knowledge” differs from another’s, the problem with communication is not so much not having things in common. Rather, what one has in common with others—“knowledge” regarding some particular topic—is in conflict with another’s conflict. In the case of not having anything in common with another, there is no basis for conversation; in the case of having different “knowledge,” there’s a basis for having conversation, but it’s likely to be of an argumentative nature. Note that in neither case is there a basis for creating feelings of solidarity; and in the latter case there’s a basis for developing hatred—and therefore hurtful behavior with reference to the other (to the extent, in fact, that one may be motivated to attempt to kill the other—something not likely in the case where the only problem two people have is having nothing in common).

We cannot comment on the role that one-way communication may have within a cynegetic society because of the basic absence of such communication. Can we, however, comment on the effects of such communication in our society? Such communication is rather common in our society, and I can’t recall ever reading or hearing any commentary on it from the standpoint of effects—because it is widely assumed, tacitly, that only positive effects are associated with it? I believe, however, that certain effects *can* be identified, and that for the most part they are not of a positive nature.

The forms of one-way communication that I regard as most notable in our society are (1) teachers/professors lecturing to students, (2) ministers/priest delivering sermons/homilies, and (3) newscasters reading news reports to a television audience. In the first and third cases the content of the message is ostensibly “factual,” whereas that in the second case is a combination of facts, valuations, and recommendations. Whereas the factual content of lectures is usually not in question, a common problem of lectures is that they fail to identify alternate views in cases where controversy exists. Newscasts have a lesser reputation in that newscasters often convey their views to the audience—if only by tone of voice and body language; and what is stated as factual may contain untruths and partial truths. The problem here is that newscasts too often rely on official sources (too often trying to cover something up), refrain from making negative comments (regardless of how true) regarding sponsors (for fear of losing them), and present information (or withhold information) that expresses the views of the station’s owner.

Sermons/homilies vary greatly in character, from denomination to denomination, and church to church within a denomination. The first sort of difference depends on how much authority the denomination in question is willing to give the Bible (and/or denominational leader); the second

sort will depend on the seminary attended, intelligence, personality, etc., of the minister/priest. Thus, in some churches the values of the larger society are not only tolerated, but fostered; in other churches, an alternate value system is promulgated—or is “mouthed,” at any rate. Few, if any, churches, however, pose any significant threat to the Existing Order—which fact is not surprising given that societies are systems, and the various components of the system tend to work together to support the system (which is why one tends not to find much social class variation within any given congregation—with Catholic congregations being somewhat of an exception).

One-way communication, if not involving suggestions³⁸¹/orders, poses as informative, and thereby as also authoritative: the views expressed are the truth, the whole truth, and only the truth. And if speeches are truly informative in that they present widely-accepted facts, and in the case of controversy make the listener aware of the different views (each fairly presented), there is little reason to object to this sort of communication. Just as if books/articles are written in such a way, there is little to object about them. However, the latter tend not to have the same authoritative character as the former—despite what is commonly claimed. For if someone delivers a message in person—including on television, where one can imagine a physical presence—the mere presence of the message-giver lends a degree of authority to his message. Admittedly, the authority imputed to a message will depend on the skill of the message-giver. Generally speaking, however, a message delivered in person will have more authority than mere hardcopy.

Despite the necessity of one-way communications—for the Existing Order, at any rate—certain “negatives” can be identified that are virtually inherent in this sort of communication. These negatives will especially be of significance if one-way communication is allowed to gain dominance over two-way communication in a society. If, however, two-way communication is allowed to have prominence in a society, and ordinary conversations are allowed to be supplemented with institutions such as the New Word Fellowship, these negatives may not arise at all. Our society does not, however, have NeWFs or their equivalents to any great degree; therefore, the negatives associated with one-way communication are, in fact, present in our society. The basic problem with the dominance of one-way communication is that it promotes *infantilization* (a topic that Paul Shepard focused on in *Nature and Madness*, but not in the context of interaction). I would expand on this claim by identifying the following as specific negatives associated with one-way communication; it promotes:

- An anti-self-learning mentality.
- An anti-self-discovery mentality (a trait that goes beyond the first).

³⁸¹ The suggestions that one associates with sermons/homilies tend not only to imply a sort of master/servant relationship between minister/priest and the congregants, but tend to be couched in a language that will be understood by the congregants; and if not fully understood, at least not rejected. For the minister/priest does not want to lose his “customers”—either by offending them (e.g., by challenging them!) or boring them. However, it is safer to bore than to offend, given that churchgoers tend to attend mainly out of habit, and will cease attending only if highly offended.

- A mentality that does not find questioning natural; a mentality, thus, that easily gets stuck at a certain level of thinking and is not only unwilling, but unable, to progress, become more mature.
- A rigid mentality that is not open to new ideas or—more basically—*other* ideas (i.e., ideas that diverge from one’s own). In fact, it is this tendency toward rigidity that results in the “stuckness” referred to above. Problems with this rigidity are that:
 - It is a hinderance to communication with others: it builds walls between others rather than bridges. As a consequence, it may lead to stressful relationships with others (that affect one’s own health negatively!), and even violence.
 - It is not conducive to creative thought—i.e., thought that would form the basis for further change in one’s thought.

In conclusion (so far as communicative interaction is concerned), it would appear that we are “designed” especially for two-way communication, and in particular such communication that has a basis that does not lend itself to disagreements between individuals. The fact that disagreements exist between people does not, of course, mean that they cannot be resolved—and amicably at that. But that would seem to be most possible if people think especially in idiographic terms, and have developed certain habits in their communicative interactions with others. There would appear to be little hope of returning to a situation that would conduce basically particularistic thinking, so we must search elsewhere for hope in establishing good two-way communication. In my opinion we need look no further than the NeWF! So that I have discovered further support for the NeWF!

One-way communication has value, and needs to continue in the Good Society. Granted, it is not “natural” so far as our benchmark is concerned (i.e., cynegetic society—which had little of it). But efforts to restore a natural way of life must not be too literalistic: certain things can be recovered, on the one hand, but it’s also true that certain other things cannot be recovered (such as a gathering-hunting economy). But it’s also true that not everything developed since the Agricultural Revolution must be discarded: some things must be retained for the simple reason that they can’t be discarded, others because they are worth retaining. In addition, of course, there is no reason why we can’t create institutions that have *never* existed! If I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t be advocating the NeWF!

Finally, we come to the topic of *physical interaction*, and it is here where the most controversy is likely to arise. In my classification on p. 3 I differentiate between sexual and non-sexual interaction, and let us begin with the latter—as potentially of a lesser controversial nature. In this case it appears to be rather clear that such interaction especially has importance for the very young, and that what’s “natural” here is that the very young receive virtually constant bodily contact for the first few years. And perhaps I should add here that it’s important that a child be weaned on its mother’s milk. The constant physical contact is important for proper physiological development, as well as developing a sense of security, and a “laid back” sort of personality that is not prone to violence. And weaning on mother’s milk is important in providing protection to the child from diseases.

The modern way of life, having as an important feature many women in the world of “outside work” (many out of economic necessity), does not lend itself to having the child be in virtual constant physical contact with the mother for a long time. Yet the importance of such contact suggests that it should be heeded. It would seem that if we were to move in a communitarian direction (e.g., per my 5-“wave” strategy), it would be possible for women to have careers, but also constantly be close to their young children for an extended period—and during that period provide mother’s milk to them. Thus, although the modern world *per se* does not provide a setting compatible with what would be best, given that the modern world must change drastically in character for human survival (to say nothing about human well-being), and that movement in a communitarian direction would be compatible with these ancient practices, the clear implication is that there is good reason to move in a communitarian direction: not only can it have “salvific” implications, but can enable the sort of child rearing that will produce children who are healthy physically and mentally, and less susceptible to disease than they are in today’s society.

Finally, we have the topic of sexual interaction, and the first point that I would like to make is that in this case there is the possibility that there is a better benchmark to use than early gatherer-hunter humans, just prior to the Agricultural Revolution (along with contemporary such peoples). Frans de Waal, among others, has pointed out that from a DNA standpoint the bonobo is closer to us humans than to any other species, and that one of the notable characteristics of bonobos is their sexual behavior. Not only do bonobos engage in sex frequently; their sexual activity is not necessarily associated with pair bonding. That is, bonobos tend to be “promiscuous”—a term that is both descriptive and biased, in that it reflects a “moral” value commonly expressed in our society. A moral value commonly expressed, but with what degree of sincerity is another matter.

Research has demonstrated that frequent sexual activity can contribute to one’s health. Where the problem enters in our society is that we have monogamy as an institution, there is the expectation with that institution that one will confine one’s sexual activity to one’s mate, but the interest in sexual activity (in terms, e.g., of frequency) may vary between the two individuals in a given pair bond (“marriage,” in most cases). In such a situation, what is the individual with a greater “need” to do? Try to suppress the desire for sexual activity or, rather, seek partners outside the marriage? Given that the institution of marriage as we know it is tinged with a concept of *ownership*—I own you, and you own me—the partner with stronger urges will tend to feel guilt if s/he “strays.” And at the same time, the partner “cheated on” will feel betrayed. It would appear, then, that we have a conflict here between a human-created notion of ownership and biologically-based urges—urges which vary between individuals, and which can vary with a given individual over time.

Sigmund Freud was one of the first moderns to recognize the difficulties that sex presented in contemporary society. I have not, however, been “into” his writings enough to make any conclusions as to whether he wrote anything useful on the subject. Nor am I aware of any other author who has. Given this, I can offer nothing definitive here and am, rather, restricted to offering just a few observations—the first point being that certain biological tendencies exist, with variations in these between individuals, and that these biological facts are best recognized and dealt with using some degree of wisdom combined with sound scientific knowledge. The biological facts are simply “there,” and must be worked around; it would be foolish either to ignore them, or recognize them and attempt to suppress them. The other factor involved here—the idea that legal marriage is a contract based on the assumption that one is entering into an

ownership situation—is a humanly-made one, and therefore one subject to change. The problem here, however, is that many in our society view marriage as a God-established institution that we dare not tamper with—so that they are extremely resistant to any change in their thinking on this matter (and therefore any changes in practices).

Again, it would seem that the process of societal system change—assuming that it is done per my strategy (i.e., one involving small communities)—provides an opportunity for the development of ideas/practices, in the sexual realm, more in accord with human design specifications. In a sense, the media (i.e., movies, television programs, some magazines) are paving the way here, in that by bringing out sexuality more, they are making change in this area more acceptable, thus more likely. (I used to think of the media's treatment of sex as a plot on the part of the elite to divert attention from what really matters—becoming a more democratic society. I have, however, come around to the view that because sexual activity has a biological basis, it *is* important.)

The fact that people are motivated to engage in sex not just during a certain season or for the purpose of procreation, along with the fact that sexual activity gives pleasure, suggests that the motive evolved not just for the purpose of procreation. What other purpose? Not pleasure *per se*. Rather, the reason that pleasure is associated with the activity is to cause it to happen, but not just for procreation. What else, then? It tends to contribute to bonding with the partner. And given that there is not, evidently, a biologically-based desire to have sex just with one other person, the suggestion is that “evolution's intent” in the case of sexual activity is to help build solidarity within the group. The group in question must, however, be one within which the concept of ownership is absent. It would seem that the small community would provide the sort of environment within which such developments could occur. Especially given that the people who would live in the initial communities would be an intellectual vanguard, flexible enough in their thinking to develop ideas capable of being put into practice—and then actually working. Once new attitudes/practices got started, they would likely spread—especially upon the deaths of those with old-fashion rigid ideas (stemming from religious ideas, ideologies, or merely habits).

Whatever decisions are made regarding changes that would work, one of the major considerations would be to develop ideas/practices that would be workable from a total societal standpoint. That is, they must be of a sort that would not only work for the adults who would be engaging in sexual activities, but would also be compatible with good child-rearing practices. The sort of societal change I have in mind—creating communities, one at a time—fits in with this principle. For given that the experiences of the initial communities would provide useful information to other community-builders—as to what to, and not to, do—whatever errors made by the initial communities could be corrected in later ones. This assumes, of course, that communities would keep in contact one with another.

The implementation of my societal system change strategy would involve many sorts of decisions beyond those involving interaction. However, I have chosen to focus just on interaction in this essay because I regard it as involving the most important kinds of decisions. I believe that if good decisions are made in this realm, good decisions will occur virtually automatically in all other realms.

Why We Celebrate Christmas

James B. Gray

We celebrate Christmas to commemorate the birth, 2,000 years ago, of Jesus. And we make gift-giving the central institution of Christmas not only because the Wise Men set a precedent for us, but because gift-giving best honors Jesus's cardinal directive—to love one's neighbor (e.g., Mark 12:29-31). That's the conventional view of the matter, at any rate.

In actuality, however, it would be more honest to explain our celebration of Christmas under the heading of Conflict Resolution. What I mean in making this assertion is that forces are operating in our society that push us in opposing directions—and that our celebration of Christmas is one of the ways we seek (if but unconsciously) to “resolve” the resulting intellectual conflict. Not that this is the *only* thing we do to resolve the conflict, or that our celebration of Christmas *actually* has its “intended” results—far from it, in fact! But that celebration functions somewhat as a salve that helps lessen the pain induced by the conflict that I am referring to here.

In asserting here that Christmas should be examined under the heading Conflict Resolution I do not wish to minimize the role that Christmas plays in providing support to our Economy. I am well aware of the fact that many retailers “live” for Christmas, and that the buying associated with Christmas generates a significant amount of employment, not all of it temporary. My argument here, however, is that what especially “drives” our celebration of Christmas is a *psychological*, not an *economic*, matter—the fact that our psyches cannot tolerate indefinitely the intellectual conflict to which we are subjected as “inmates” of American society.

What is the conflict to which I am referring? On the one hand, the governing values in our society are competitive individualism, materialism, achievement, manipulation, domination/control, sexism, homophobia, racism, exploitation, etc. And underlying all of those values is a more fundamental one, that of *selfishness*. But not only is our society governed by selfishness and its various derivatives; our society provides us with a number of handy *excuses* for being “possessed” by those governing values (e.g., meritocratic theory, drawing in part from Adam Smith). In addition, and “happily,” our society provides us with various *diversions* (including intellectual ones, such as Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” theory) that direct our attention away from the fact that we are being controlled by our society’s dominant values. And, finally, the “psychologistic” thinking (i.e., the habit of explaining behavior on the basis of internal factors) that is so embedded in our psyches causes us to “blame the victim” in almost “knee-jerk” fashion—and then search for a rationale for so doing only if we feel it necessary to offer justification.

Despite the fact that our society is “powered” by a certain cluster of values that by no means are in accord with Jesus’s “love the neighbor” command, and that various features of our society make it difficult for most Americans to fully recognize that their lives are basically guided by non-“Jesuan” values, the fact of the matter is that most, if not all, Americans have been *exposed* to “Jesuan” values, and “know” (in their unconscious minds, at any rate) that their lives *should* be governed by Jesuan values. They also “know,” however, that they *must* live by the governing non-Jesuan values if they are to achieve any sort of success—if, indeed, they are to survive at a respectable level. (They—especially if blessed some degree of intelligence—may also know,

explicitly, that our society, as a society, is *dependent* on those non-Jesuan values being dominant for its continued existence.) Because this latter “knowledge” (i.e., that one’s success—and even survival—is dependent on living by non-Jesuan values) is not only at an unconscious level but in conflict with the society’s governing values, many (if not most) in our society have a “war” going on in their minds—a war that needs somehow to get resolved. The celebration of Christmas helps do this.

Before discussing *how* Christmas so functions, I should note that the unconsciously-held desire to live by Jesuan values is in our minds not just because of our *exposure* to presentations of such values (in, e.g., sermons / homilies). More fundamentally, this desire is in our minds because it is a part of our biological heritage—a fact that is becoming ever more clear to those scientists doing research of relevance. This is not the place to pursue this point, but suffice it to say that the arguments put forward by, e.g., sociobiologists to the effect that humans are naturally selfish are based not only on spurious “facts,” but faulty reasoning. Empirical and theoretical evidence can be adduced to support these assertions; but, again, this is not the place to present such evidence.

Returning to the conflict referred to above: The key fact about it is that it induces feelings of guilt in many, if not most, of us—and does so primarily because of the fact that we “know,” deep down, that our society virtually forces us to behave in an unnatural—indeed inhuman—way. We “know” that sociologist Philip Slater was very much “on target” in stating, a number of years ago (in *The Pursuit of Loneliness*), that our society is not designed for humans.

But how to “address” those feelings of guilt—in a partial manner, at any rate? One way is to celebrate Christmas. Christmas gives us an opportunity to pay lip service to Jesus’s teachings one day a year so that we can then ignore them, in good conscience, the rest of the year. Christmas enables us to atone (if but somewhat) for the fact that we live—*must* live—by non-Jesuan values most of the year, but also “know” that we are prostituting ourselves—as humans—thereby.

“Lip service” is an appropriate characterization here because the gift-giving associated with Christmas involves little “love-of-the-neighbor” (defined broadly) sort of love. Rather, gift-giving is usually limited to “loved ones”—i.e., members of one’s immediate family: the primary consideration in gift-giving is not helping those with needs, but giving to “one’s own” (and giving to further one’s career). In addition, of course, gift-giving (along with such practices of decorating the exterior of one’s home) blatantly reflects the materialism of our society, and our orientation to competitive individualism (“conspicuous consumption,” to use Thorstein Veblen’s famous term).

It is true, of course, that Jesus’s teachings *are* featured in many Christian churches Sunday after Sunday, so that Christmas is not the only time that Jesus is given his due. But only at Christmas is one expected to put Jesus’s teachings into practice—and in a rather distorted way at that. What keeps the churches “in business” is an unspoken compact that congregants have with their pastors: “We congregants will attend your services, and give you a salary, if you promise to entertain us, make us feel good, and not challenge us to take Jesus’s teachings seriously—not challenge us to follow ‘in his steps’ [to allude to Charles M. Sheldon’s old classic]. And if you *do* recommend that we live in accord with Jesus’s teachings, do so in such abstract terms that we

will have no idea how to ‘operationalize’ (i.e., put into practice) the principles you enunciate, and therefore won’t.”

Purists will decry this state of affairs; but so long as American society is governed by non-Jesuan values, Jesus’s teaching will need either to remain in the background, or be kept at a high level of abstraction—so that his teachings will remain just that, mere teachings. Will, that is, resemble a picture in being something to look at and admire, but not do anything with.

Is there any reason to hope that this situation will change drastically in a positive direction? Absolutely not! What’s most likely is that American society will continue to be governed by non-Jesuan values, that we will continue to celebrate Christmas as we have been. In addition, it’s also likely that our society—propelled along by those values—will continue on its “runaway” path. By *that* I mean that it will continue to crumble internally, while its inmates continue their pollution of Earth—to the point that Earth System will “flip” (to use James Lovelock’s term), and Earth will be rendered uninhabitable by us humans (among other species). Meaning, of course, that our species (along with many others) will become extinct—likely before this century has been completed. Earth will then be rid of that “cancer: (from Earth’s standpoint), humankind.

Not a happy prospect from a human perspective. But *our* perspective doesn’t count for much. After all, we need Earth, but Earth has no need for us. Oh, by the way: Merry Christmas!

The Next American System: An Alternate View

James B. Gray

In the Fall 2008 issue of *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas* (available at web site www.democracyjournal.org) Michael Lind advocates (in “The Next American System”) a new American System for the twenty-first century, to succeed what he perceives as the previous two such Systems: the First American System, during which there was, e.g., a fostering of “infant industries;” and the Second American System, during which there were “piecemeal” federal government programs such as rural electrification and the building of the interstate highway system. A “well-developed and well-implemented” new System, asserts Lind, will be “crucial in revitalizing American economic prosperity in the twenty-first century.”

For that goal of economic prosperity to be achieved, Lind contends that it will be necessary to (1) promote American competitiveness, (2) rebuild America’s infrastructure, and (3) redesign American finance. What I particularly wish to note here regarding Lind’s vision of the (American) future is that (1) the goal that he “holds up” for the remainder of this century of that of economic prosperity, and (2) the three means (or components) that he identifies as necessary for achieving that goal are ones that, he assumes, would be implemented by, and only by, government—our central (i.e., federal) one in particular.

My reaction to this perspective on our future has been shaped by a feeling of kinship, that I have developed over the years, with the Hebrew prophets and priests of old. Therefore, my vision of our future is one that is rather different from that of Lind—and my purposes here are to (1) briefly describe that vision, (2) specify a societal “shape” consistent with that vision, (3) outline a strategy for achieving that societal shape, and (4) address some of the objections that might be raised relative to aspects of my “plan.” Given that I perceive my vision as being rooted in the Bible—and the “Old Testament” in particular—I need, however, to precede any discussion of that vision with a summary of my views as to what the ancient Hebrew prophets-priests were “about.” (For a more detailed discussion of the matter the reader is referred to my [Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#).) Here, then, are the salient facts that I associate with those ancients:

- They valued a society within which neediness was absent. Although their explicit focus was on the absence of *physical* neediness, some of their directives (e.g., those related to gleaning) indicate a sensitivity to psychological needs as well
- At times they presented a (commonly-held) “picture” of their conception of the ideal society—which, for them, was one of basically self-sufficient families. That conception indicates, of course, that implicitly they valued a society which was fundamentally egalitarian.
- They claimed to have received (“heard”) the injunctions that they uttered from Yahweh, which attribution may have given those directives—when communicated to fellow group members—some measure of force. (A modern, of course, might dispute the supernatural aspect of this claim and argue, rather, that the edicts in question had their origin in a “remembrance,” by the prophet-priest involved, of an earlier, more “natural,” way of life—that “remembrance” being *perceived*, however, as a message delivered to them

orally by the voice of Yahweh. Given this perceived origin, it is understandable why the message “received” would have been perceived as of such importance that it needed to be delivered at once to those for whom it was intended. And that the message, once delivered, had some degree of force with its hearers.)

- Insofar as neediness existed, it was attributed in large part to the society’s “haves”—i.e., their failure to share with the society’s “have nots.”
- More importantly, however, directives were aimed at the society’s “haves” for the simple reason that it was they who had the means to reduce, if not eliminate, the problem of neediness. Thus, the orientation of these ancients was not so much to fix blame as to do what they could to ensure that the problem of neediness would be corrected.
- To motivate “haves” so to act, not only was the claim made that the decrees being mouthed originated with Yahweh. In addition, often a covenant concept was invoked (“I did for you, in that I delivered you from slavery in Egypt; now you have an obligation to do for me—by obeying my commands”); and a threat of invasion by a foreign power was at times raised, were the response to be one of disobedience.

What can one “glean” (!) from these facts about the ancient Hebrew prophets-priests that would have relevance for “The Next American System”? Let me preface my comments here by noting that in 1894 English journalist William Thomas Stead [1849 – 1912] published a book with the title *If Christ Came to Chicago* (the title taken from a poem by James Russell Lowell). What I propose here is somewhat on the same order in that I ask one to imagine that, e.g., Amos were magically to appear on the scene here in the United States today. What might be the content of his preaching? (I hope that by taking the rather audacious stance of presuming to know the answer, I do not have the same fate as W. T. Stead—who was a passenger on the ill-fated *RMS Titanic*!)

My first assumption here is that rather than directing his “commandments” to our political leaders (such as Barack Obama), our hypothetical prophet would direct them to the society’s “haves”—under the tacit assumption (or hope?) that at least some of them would act on his (actually, Yahweh’s) recommendations, doing so either as individuals or via foundations that they had established and funded. What decrees might our hypothetical prophet direct at our society’s “haves”? I suggest the following as primary ones; act so that the society would have the following characteristics:

- The needs—physical and psychological—of all in the society are met.
- Harmonious interaction patterns prevail throughout the society
- The society is relatively egalitarian.
- All who want it have work, and that work is meaningful (e.g., enables one to feel that one is using and developing one’s abilities, while making a contribution to the society) and pleasant.

- Enables all adults to have a significant role in making decisions that will affect them.
- Fosters engaging in physical activities for a part of each day.
- Gives everyone a significant amount of time, each month, to have close contact with Nature.
- The per capita usage (direct and indirect) of fossil fuels is at a low level; indeed, the per capita use of energy *per se* is at a low level.

Why direct these Eight Suggestions at private citizens who are “haves” rather than at government leaders? Because societies are systems consisting of various sectors, with one particular sector tending to be dominant at any given time. For several centuries now the Economy has been the dominant sector, and all other sectors have played a subservient role: the religion sector, the education sector, the political sector, etc. Because the political sector is at the service of the Economy, and the Economy itself is subject to certain laws of system functioning and development, it is foolish to look to government with the expectation that it will bring about significant societal system change. (Even with Barack Obama as president, I might add—as one might guess given his strong ties to Wall Street.)

If our societal system were machine-like in its functioning, there would be no hope of realizing the eight goals listed above. The “laws” that govern the societal system, however, are more probabilistic than those that operate in the physical world. Because of this fact, there is some basis for believing that at least significant progress can be made in accomplishing those goals. If I did not believe this, I would not be writing this essay.

The above Eight Suggestions likely suggest several questions, but the one I wish to focus on initially here is: *Why* would any “haves” in our society pay any attention to these “commandments”? After all, do not recent Wall Street events demonstrate that such people not only have an orientation to self (rather than to the society), but to the short run? Given their worldview—and their lack of physical contact with “normal” people—isn’t it foolish to expect, first, that they would even become *aware* of the above “commandments” and, second, pay them any *heed*, even were they to become so aware?

(For my part, I lack the means to bring these Eight Suggestions to the attention of our society’s “haves.” Even if this essay receives some measure of publicity, there is no guarantee that it will be read by “haves”—especially ones willing and able to act on the Suggestions. Or even read by someone with “connections” to relevant “haves,” for that matter. All I can do, then, is write with the hope that on the one hand I have written in a sufficiently clear and comprehensive manner, and on the other hand am fortunate enough to have my essay read by at least a few individuals willing and able to act appropriately on the “plan” that I offer herein.)

To return to the question of why a “have” should give attention to the above Eight Suggestions, and the “plan” that I offer below for implementing them. Let me list a few reasons here:

- If you claim to be a Christian, Jew, or Moslem (among other possibilities), you should know that your religion enjoins you to have consideration for others who are less fortunate.

- I use the words “less fortunate” here deliberately because you should have sufficient intelligence and education to recognize that your success is attributable only in part to your own “hard work.” In addition, it is attributable to your innate intelligence (which you merely inherited from your parents), to your home environment (which you didn’t create), to your society (which you found ready-made, via the efforts of millions of people before you), etc. Indeed, your success may be more a function of your duplicity, dishonesty, pathological drivenness, etc., than to any positive traits!
- If you have no concern for your less fortunate fellows, this is an indication that you have become alienated from your human nature. Despite the fact that “human nature” has received a “bad rap” over the centuries (at least from the time of Augustine of Hippo [354 – 430] CE), recent research has been turning the old negative view of human nature on its head.
- An important reason why you should feel some degree of empathy for your less fortunate fellows is that you are much more dependent on them than you would like to admit. Let me introduce a “thought experiment” here. Assume that all of the “ordinary” people in our society—the sales clerks, machine tenders, security guards, warehouse workers, truck drivers, office workers, building cleaners, window washers, construction workers, restaurant employees, farm workers, firemen, etc.—were suddenly to be “raptured” away to a better place. (The allusion here is to, e.g., Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 1970, and Tim LaHaye’s series of “Left Behind” books—and bumper stickers that one sees occasionally.) What would be the implications of this “blessed event”? What’s left of our society would come to a screeching halt, of course. Chaos would quickly erupt because, e.g., food would become unobtainable, and there would be no police—or even military—to keep order.

The “haves” in our society have been able to take ordinary people for granted because there’s good reason to believe that “they’ll always be with us”: “These people have a sex drive just like we do, and the laws of heredity operate so that there will always be plenty of people with low-to-middle levels of intelligence and skill.” But as my “thought experiment” above makes clear, the “haves” of our society are utterly dependent upon those who are less fortunate; and recognition of this fact should cause them to question their worldview, and the behaviors that stem from that worldview.

- I noted above that one strategy used by the ancient Hebrews (prophets in particular) was to warn the “haves” in their society that if they did not begin to obey Yahweh’s laws (many of which had a social welfare orientation), Yahweh would punish them by allowing a neighboring power to make war against their society, the result being defeat for the Hebrews. Today also there is a threat looming over us, and it is a much more serious one than what faced the ancient Hebrews: the threat of “global warming.” Because it is the “haves” in our society who have most stake in the Existing Order, it would be wise of them at least to pay heed to the threat represented by “global warming”—a threat that exists because of humankind’s heavy use of fossil fuels, beginning about 1750 CE.

Regarding this threat, it is becoming increasingly clear to scientists that from the perspective of geological time, sudden changes in the global mean temperature are the norm, rather than

gradual ones. Thus, although the “global warming” that has been occurring over the past few decades has so far been fairly gradual, what should be expected is that shortly we will be entering a period of “runaway” during which change is rapid. Indeed, we may already have entered such a period. And associated with such a period is not only an increase in the global mean temperature but also increased storminess, more severe storms, and increased unpredictability in weather phenomena. These various changes have a number of implications relevant for us humans, including more hurricane and flooding loss of life and damage to property, the increased incidence of droughts (with associated fires in some areas), the spread of diseases, disruption of food supplies, coastal flooding due to a rise in sea level, the disappearance of smaller islands for the same reason, etc.

Some scientists predict that by the end of this century as many as 60% of all species now in existence will be extinct. Scientists also predict that the human population will be significantly reduced—especially in Third World countries—by the end of the century. Reduced by hundreds of *millions*, that is. Indeed, who’s to say that the human species itself won’t become extinct before the century is out! Indeed, James Lovelock—originator of the Gaia Hypothesis—has come close to saying this in his recent statement (*The Revenge of Gaia*, 2006) that “before this century is over, billions of us will die [,] and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the arctic region where the climate remains tolerable.” In short, the problem of “global warming” is a serious problem indeed!—one that if not addressed within a decade (argues NASA’s James Hansen), will result in a turbulent future for humankind, with the ultimate outcome remaining a question mark.

Thus, there are good reasons why the “haves” of our society should not only have an interest in the Eight Suggestions listed above, but become actively involved in implementing them. If they are not now doing so, let’s assume that it’s not just a function of their particular worldview, but their lack of awareness of the Suggestions, and lack of ideas regarding specifically what to do to implement them. I realize, however, that I am being overly generous in providing these excuses for “haves”—which leads me to the conclusion that in developing a strategy for achieving the above-listed goals, although it will still be necessary to look to “haves” for leadership, it will also be necessary to develop a strategy that will work even though just a handful of “haves” assume that role.

Keeping this latter point in mind, the tasks before us now are to (1) specify the “shape” of a society within which the Eight Suggestions could become realities, (2) specify a strategy for achieving that society, and (3) address possible objections that might be made regarding what I propose. I should add here that—reflective of my admiration for the ancient Hebrew prophets—priests—the goals that are foremost in my mind are reducing neediness and creating a more egalitarian society. This does not, however, mean that I minimize the importance of the “global warming” threat. Rather, what it means is that rather than looking to science and technology for answers to this problem (actually collection of problems), I look to societal system change.

Given this latter fact, I feel it necessary to precede a discussion of my vision of the New Order with some commentary on why I place an emphasis on societal system change as a solution—a solution, I might add, that I see as simultaneously addressing most of the problems currently faced by our society.

Why Societal System Change?

Prior to the Agricultural Revolution (several thousand years ago) there occurred a co-development of humans as biological entities and their “cynegetic” (to use the late Paul Shepard’s term in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, 1973) way of life—i.e., way of life with a gatherer-hunter “economy.” This co-development involved the operation of natural selection mechanisms (sexual selection, predation, and environmental change—but *not* “natural selection” as defined by Charles Darwin), and resulted in humans not only developing their particular physical characteristics, but a *correlation* between those characteristics and the (1) stimuli to which they were exposed as a part of their way of life, along with the (2) behaviors associated with their cynegetic way of life (3) and substances ingested. As a consequence of this concordance between biologically-based characteristics and a cynegetic way of life, a high level of well-being evidently prevailed. (We know this not only as a result of anthropological studies of contemporary “primitives,” but archeological and current primatological research.)

During the Agricultural Revolution, however, this concordance began to be weakened: a “discrepancy” (David P. Barash’s term in *Sociobiology and Behavior*, 1977) began to develop. That is, whereas way of life began to change (with its implications for changes in stimuli, behaviors, and what was ingested), the human as a biological entity remained basically unchanged. The results of this growing discrepancy were a decrease in well-being for many (directly the result of the emergence of class-caste social systems), and pathological behaviors having their basis in ill-being—which behaviors, when directed against others, resulted in “second-level” ill-being in those others, which

The consequences of this increasing discrepancy have been manifold—and primarily negative: the rise of mental and physical illnesses (“diseases of civilization”), aggressive behavior, suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. Indeed, likely one could attribute virtually all of the societal problems that we face today—and that other societies face—to this increasing discrepancy. Even the rise of imperialistic tendencies on the part of *nations*—expressed today in the current Iraq adventure—can be thought of as having their origins in this increasing discrepancy.

The development of “civilized” existence did not have “global warming” implications, however, until fairly recently—having its roots in the development, in the early 1700s, of the steam engine as a practical source of power. This innovation—attributed to ironmonger and Baptist lay preacher Thomas Newcomen [1664 – 1729]—received its first application for pumping water from coal mines. This (coal-burning) contraption quickly, however, found applications in production facilities (powering machines) and in the transportation industry (powering steam locomotives). Not only did the use of the steam engine enable production facilities to produce more goods and do so more rapidly (eventually giving birth to the *factory*); its application in the transportation industry enabled goods to be shipped quickly, and in large quantities, to distant locations—providing factories with the increased sales needed to justify increased production.

Use of the steam engine not only brought about change in the character of production (leading eventually to the ideas of interchangeable parts and the assembly line). It enabled the location of production plants away from rivers (previously used as sources of power, as well as transportation arteries), a growth in firm size (and, later, firm ownership possibilities), the development of new industries, further developments in technology, urbanization (with

accompanying rural depopulation)—and (of particular interest for the purposes of this essay) increased income disparities, and pollution.

Later, coal came to be used also (and primarily) for the generation of electricity, and other fossil fuels also came into use—for powering automobiles, trucks, ships, and aircraft, and for heating/cooling buildings, among other uses. Which developments led to an increased “supply” of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse” gases into the atmosphere. Indeed, an upward spiral was initiated whereby technological developments led not only to more, and more efficient, production but to expanded consumer demand—which spurred further technological development, which

One result of this spiraling process has been increased *per capita* use (direct and indirect) of fossil fuels, and therefore increased *per capita* responsibility for pollution—although, to be fair, one could very well argue that pollution responsibility is positively correlated with income, meaning that it is especially the “haves” (of our and other societies) who are primarily responsible for our “global warming” problem. Another reason, by the way, why they should show concern for this problem!

But that’s not the point that I want to emphasize here. Rather, I wish to note that we humans—led by *Western* humans, and especially Americans—have unwittingly built a trap for ourselves. What I mean in saying this is that as we have developed a “high” material standard of living—one which also happens to be a high-*polluting* one, given its dependence on fossil fuels—we have become *accustomed* to that standard of living. As a result, it is perfectly understandable why most of us assume that we *must* continue that standard of living, and therefore *must* develop and deploy new energy sources that will allow us to continue our high standard of living. That is, our current way of life has so affected our thought processes that we are simply unable to conceive of a solution to the “global warming” problem other than one of a technological/scientific nature. And I should add that by “we” I am including the highly intelligent and highly educated in our midst.

Given that my solution to the “global warming” problem (which, by the way, simultaneously addresses the other seven of the Eight Suggestions listed above) involves a significant *reduction* in material standard of living, before presenting my “picture” of a desirable New Order I need to provide a rationale that would make such a reduction at least somewhat palatable. In doing so let me first state that I recognize that certain material things are necessary to survival as well as some modicum of comfort. I would insist, however, that the primary sources of well-being lie elsewhere:

- The human species is one of those species that falls into the category “social.” Indeed, not only do most humans have an innate *desire* to be with other humans; they have a *need* so to be: if, upon birth, one is abandoned, one is likely to die within a few days, even if not killed by a predator; if one is provided care by members of another species (a rare, but not unknown, occurrence) one will not develop into a recognizably human being (rather, one will become a “feral” being).
- Humans have a need to be a part of a small group—e.g., one no more than about 500 persons in size. (See, e.g., Kirkpatrick Sale’s *Human Scale*, 1980—a huge book on the

virtues of smallness!.) A “group” here should be understood as not merely a collection of individuals (i.e., a group in a *statistical* sense) but, rather, a set of individuals who interact one with another (i.e., a *sociological* group)—so that each person knows virtually all other members of the group.

- It is not enough (for a high level of well-being) simply to be a member of a small group, however. Harmonious relationships must characterize the group. This does not mean that all interactions within the group are conflict-free; it *does* mean, however, that when conflicts arise, that fact is of concern to other members of the group—who then “naturally” act to defuse the conflict. That is, there is unconscious “recognition” within the group that all have a stake in harmonious relationships, so that the social fabric must not be allowed to become torn. Given this perception of conflict, when offenses occur, the point becomes to re-integrate the offender into the societal system again rather than inflict punishment—although at times that (and even banishment) may be called for.
- Healthy interaction involves such activities as conversing with others as equals (and in a manner such that individual views are welcomed and respected—rather than treated as, e.g., “heretical”); working together with others to provide sustenance (or other) needs; recreating together; and participating in certain rituals or ceremonies together.
- We humans are “designed” for physical activity, and must have a certain amount of it for good physical and mental health. Physical activity can be associated not only with work, but also play—and includes sexual activity. The latter, of course, will tend to be more strictly guided by mores established by the group than the other activities. (For a “design” perspective on humans see George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*, 1977.)
- In working with others one must feel that one is making a contribution to the group—that one is not a “slacker.” Conversely, one must perceive *others* in the group as at least attempting to make a contribution to the group.
- Related to this point, however, one must feel that one’s contribution is one that “fits” one—in terms of one’s abilities, interests, etc.
- Also, in acting as an individual, one must feel that one is a decision-maker, not just acting out of blind habit or doing the bidding of others. (See, e.g., Elizabeth Boyden Howes and Sheila Moon, *Man [sic] the Choicemaker*, 1973.) One mark of a healthy interactional situation, in fact, is that all members of the group perceive (if but unconsciously) themselves this way, and feel that they have the respect of other members of the group.
- A final need that I would mention is extended periods of close contact with the “surround.” Our distant ancestors, of course, had constant contact with the surround, and not only did this contribute to their well-being, it affected their mode of thinking. During many of their awake hours their minds were absorbed in the surround, and their perceptions were not “translated” into words—including words merely thought, rather than spoken. And when such translation *did* occur, the thought that occurred was

primarily of an *idiographic* nature—i.e., oriented to *particular* facts. The “primitives” *did* make generalizations—and were, in fact, excellent “observational scientists” (as anthropologists have discovered). *Nomothetic* thinking (i.e., that oriented to generalizations), however, played a much smaller role in their thinking than it does in ours. “Historical” thinking also played a role in “primitive” life, but primarily served an explanatory role, and took the form of stories (what we arrogant moderns tend to term “myths”). The historical thinking that is characteristic in *our* society, on the other hand, takes the form of narratives that purport to recount events that “actually” took place; and although historical explanations are not unknown in our society, they are much less common than is the case in “primitive” societies.

It may be difficult for many Americans (and others) to accept the truism (a rather “modern” one, in fact) that acquisition—including continual acquisition of the new—is *not* the path to psychological well-being. But this *is* a truism that we *must* learn to accept. Fortunately, the strategy that I have developed to accomplish this end “works around” this reluctance, and does not even require that many “haves” come to agree with my “plan.” A final point: my insistence that we need not only to reduce *energy* usage *per se*, but reduce *fossil fuel* usage may be an overly-conservative stance; but my view here is that given the seriousness of the “global warming” threat, it is best to err on the side of conservatism. After all, we have but one Earth!

I hope that I have said enough above to convince the reader of the necessity of societal system change. If I have not, then so be it: after all, it is necessary to convince only a few “haves” regarding the virtues of my plan to have some chance of its implementation.

What is my plan? Before presenting it I must briefly describe the “shape” of the New Order, as I envision it.

The New Society’s “Shape”

The fundamental initial point that I would like to make here is that (as some translations of Proverbs 29:18 read) without a vision, the people perish. I mean by this that herein I present an *ideal* situation—one which I know to be unrealizable, and not even entirely desirable if it were realizable (because, as Gregory Bateson argued many years ago in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1973, a literal “return” would involve a loss of the wisdom we have gained from being “off the track” these many centuries). Why, then, present this ideal? Because it is *understandable* (e.g., one that can be visualized), and even *plausible*; these facts combined with the desirable characteristics associated with the end state mean that it can provide people with a *vision*—and *that’s* important because visions have *motivational force*. If people are presented with a vision (and also have an *ability*—financial and otherwise—to act on that vision), there is the possibility that they will become motivated to work to realize that vision—and proceed accordingly. If not to make that vision entirely real, at least to make a *contribution* that points in that direction—which is what’s *actually* wanted anyway (a point that I will comment on further in the Postscript that concludes this essay).

As it is *not* my intention in this essay to be exhaustive, let me simply state here that because I associate a “natural” way of life with what the late Paul Shepard termed “cynegetic” peoples (i.e., peoples whose “economic” life was characterized by gathering and hunting), and those

peoples lived in (1) small, (2) basically cooperative, and (3) largely self-sufficient groups, the New Order that I have in mind for the near future (in the United States, if not elsewhere) is one consisting of small *eco-communities*. The “eco” here suggests that residents would recognize that the major sources of pollution can be thought of as (1) production, (2) transportation (of goods, as well as trips to work, stores, dental offices, etc.), and (3) the heating/cooling of buildings. They therefore would strive to reduce their “pollution contribution” as much as possible by (1) consuming little (this having production effects, of course, and therefore pollution implications); (2) producing what they could of what they needed, and (3) doing so using local materials wherever possible; (4) minimizing travel; and (5) building structures to be well-insulated and to use passive solar so far as possible. They would, then, strive to minimize their direct and indirect usage of energy; and although they might not be able to avoid the use of fossil fuels entirely, they would attempt to develop alternatives to that energy source.

I should perhaps add here that striving to make eco-communities as self-sufficient as possible would serve to help reduce the “global warming” problem. As a proliferation of such communities began to occur, this would help reduce that problem even further. Another implication of a proliferation of eco-communities, however, would be that there would arise an ability of the communities to begin trading one with another, and therefore become somewhat specialized—adding to efficiencies in production. However, they would continue to strive for low energy usage *per capita*. And their restriction of trade (so far as possible) just to other eco-communities in the emerging New Order would help weaken the Existing Order—a point given more attention later.

An eco-community would be designed to be “practical,” but that does not mean that esthetic considerations would not also be involved. Members of an eco-community having esthetic sensibilities would be allowed—and even encouraged—to use their talents to beautify the community—not only in building design and building arrangement, but in furnishings, plantings, etc. In addition, those with the ability to do so would be encouraged to make artistic, musical, and other cultural contributions.

Eco-communities would, of course, differ one from another, given that residents would play a role in their planning (and even construction, perhaps). These differences would include differences in ownership characteristics, in that some would be established as cooperatives (with the cooperative owning all of the community’s real property), some would be “company towns” (with a single individual or organization/corporation owning all of the real property), etc.. But whether the former or the latter (or something else, for that matter), all residents would have a voice in the governance of the community’s affairs. This would be less true in a company town (ECT) than a cooperative community (CEC), but even the owner(s) of a company town would need to give the town’s residents a voice in the town’s affairs—else many residents likely would abandon the town for a cooperative (or other) eco-community (unless they have weak egos).

How to Get There

The point of view that I have developed over the years has been influenced especially by Thorstein Veblen’s writings, but also by such books as (listed chronologically, by publication date) Maurice R. Stein, *The Eclipse of Community*, 1960; Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, 1970; George H. Leonard, *The Transformation*, 1972; Gordon Rattray Taylor,

Rethink: *A Paraprimitive Solution*, 1972; Philip Slater, *Earthwalk*, 1974; S. Boyd Eaton *et al.*, *The Paleolithic Prescription*, 1988; Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, 1991; Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity*, 1993; Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, 1998; and Noel T. Boaz, *Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick*, 2002. (Needless to say, the Bible has also had a highly significant influence on my thinking.)

More specifically, (1) the (dynamic) “end state” that I have in mind can perhaps be thought of as a cousin of that presented by Bill McKibben in *Deep Economy* (2007)—although my progressivism is of a “bolder” (i.e., more radical!) sort than that of McKibben. (2) I have borrowed the idea of stages of development from Jack Lessinger’s *Regions of Opportunity* (1986); indeed, just as Lessinger’s theory of *historico-spatial development* has five stages, so does my *strategy* have five stages. My stages, however, are rather different in “composition” from those of Lessinger, and in a sense one can think of my five stages as all contained within Lessinger’s final (“Penturbian”) one. Finally, (3) to display honor to my ethnic heritage (the seafaring Vikings: my great-grandfather’s name—Einar Görgensen—got anglicized to “Edward Gray”) I use the term “wave” in place of “stage.” Ironically, although I look to “haves” (a few, at any rate) for leadership with my plan, that leadership in conjunction with the operation of “market forces” will (logically, at any rate) result in what might (by some) be termed a “socialistic” society!—albeit one that would be rather different than what *we* have now (i.e., “socialism for the rich”!), or what Europeans have. What this illustrates is that there are market economies, and then there are market economies: the type that we have become used to is not the only *conceivable* type and—I would like to think—not the only *possible* type.

If I have borrowed the idea of *stages* from Jack Lessinger, in developing the logic of my strategy I have derived my inspiration—and theoretical argument—specifically from an economist of a previous generation, and quote here the passage that led me to my particular strategy:

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, cash-crop farmers specializing in one crop would have to abandon farming as a business and go back to it as a way of life. The packing-houses, mills, and canneries, not to mention the railroads, wholesalers, and retailers, which now distribute agricultural products[,] would find their business confined to the production and distribution of exotic foodstuffs. Food is our most important industry. A war of attrition, such as we [i.e., the Borsodi family] have been carrying on all alone, if extended on a large enough scale, would put the food industry out of its misery, for miserable it certainly is, all the way from the farmers who produce the raw materials[,] to the men, women, and children who toil in the canneries, mills, and packing-towns, and in addition reduce proportionately the congestion, adulteration, unemployment, and unpleasant odors to all of which the food industry contributes liberally.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, the textile and clothing industries, with their low wages, seasonal unemployment, cheap and shoddy products, would shrink to the production of those fabrics and those garments which it is impractical for the average family to produce for itself.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, undesirable and non-essential factories of all sorts would disappear[,] and only those which would be desirable and essential[,] because they would be making tools and machines, electric light bulbs, iron and copper pipe, wire of all kinds, and the myriad of

things which can best be made in factories, would remain to furnish employment to those benighted human beings who prefer to work in factories.

Domestic production, if enough people turned to it, would not only annihilate the undesirable and non-essential factory by depriving it of a market for its products. It would do more. It would release men and women from their present thralldom to the factory[,] and make them masters of machines instead of servants to them; it would end the power of exploiting them which ruthless, acquisitive, and predatory men now possess; it would free them for the conquest of comfort, beauty[,] and understanding.

—Ralph Borsodi, *Flight From the City* (1933)

If. If. If. Seventy-five years ago Ralph Borsodi identified the “Achilles heel” of a society, such as ours, which has an extensive “division” of labor: if a significant segment of the society’s population withdraws (e.g., as a result of “rapturing”!) its support from the society (as consumers, as workers, and as taxpayers), that society will collapse, to be replaced by something quite different (if not necessarily better). Although Borsodi’s focus (in the above quotation) was on how the actions of individuals and families, if enough were involved, could impact significantly on our *economy*, it should be obvious that those same actions would also significantly impact the *sociological*, *political*, etc., institutions of our society, and even our *culture*. But not only did Borsodi *not* consider those possibilities (in any detail, at any rate); he presented no *blueprint* for “getting from here to there.” And that is a major deficiency indeed—a deficiency all too common in the writings of those who have developed “pictures” of a New Order. It is, however, a deficiency which I propose to address in the discussion that follows.

My principal intent in the presentation below is to identify and discuss a scenario (or strategy, if you will) of societal system change. I wish, however, not only to discuss that scenario, but indicate the thinking behind it—i.e., its rationale. For I believe that the scenario itself will be more readily accepted as sound and implementable if the “theory” underlying it is presented first. I should note, however, that it is *not* my intent here to convert others to my way of thinking. I present certain conclusions, and the thinking behind those conclusions, but make no attempt to “make believers” of any of my readers. Rather, I proceed on the assumption that my readers are *already* “believers” (or potentially so). If they aren’t, so be it.

For the purposes of the presentation to follow I take the following as “givens”—as “indisputable truths” that provide the foundation for the strategy:

- Our existing way of life is unsustainable. As R. Buckminster Fuller stated several years ago (*Utopia or Oblivion*, 1969) our society is a “utopian” one. But *not* in the sense of being an *ideal* society but, rather, in the sense of being an *impossible* one. One that is *attainable*, yes, for it *does* exist; but *impossible* in being one that *cannot continue* indefinitely.
- Our way of life is unsustainable because we (especially we United States people—although the Chinese are now beginning to surpass us) are pouring carbon dioxide (and other “greenhouse” gases) into the atmosphere at high absolute and *per capita* rates by virtue of our use of fossil fuels, and are thereby helping bring about “global warming.”

This could result in “flipping” (to use James Lovelock’s term); that is, it could result in Earth “suddenly” warming, eventually reaching a new temperature equilibrium, as the *negative* feedback mechanisms (which have been “working” to resist temperature change) give way to *positive* feedback mechanisms (which will “work” to *further* such change).

The fact that the observatory directed by (the late) Dr. Charles Keeling on Mauna Loa in Hawaii shows that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is now increasing at an *increasing rate*, gives one reason for accepting what Dr. Lovelock has proposed as a *possibility* as a virtual *certainty*. For given that we have but one Earth to experiment with, it is better to err on the side of a conservative position. If we ignore the warning signs about this (such as the recent severe hurricane seasons and flooding), and are wrong about not thinking of “global warming” as a threat, we may very well be contributing to the demise of our species. Most religions teach us that killing (including suicide) is wrong; we ought not, then, be culpable in the extinction—or at least decimation—of our species; we ought not to be helping our species commit suicide (and in the process kill many other species as well).

- Our high absolute and *per capita* “contribution” of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere will be reduced substantially through, and *only* through, societal system change of the right sort—which will especially reduce per capita *energy* usage *per se* substantially, not just fossil fuel usage. That is, the path to “salvation” is not primarily one involving the shift to alternate energy sources (although that will also be involved).
- If the right sort of societal system change were to occur, this would mean not only the (possible) “salvation” of our species, but an increase in well-being for most people. Two qualifiers are in order, however. First, it is by no means certain that humankind *can* be “saved” from extinction, even were decisive salvific steps taken immediately, and done so worldwide. Second, although it would appear necessary for United States citizens to provide the leadership regarding societal system change, it is necessary that such change occur not only in our society, but in other ones as well. It would not appear necessary, however, for societal system change to assume the same *form* elsewhere as it does here.
- It is good to be in favor of human survival (a “pro-life” stance!) and a high level of well-being for all. Not only are such values consistent with the Jewish and Christian Bibles, but with the Scriptures of all major religions.

What these “givens” suggest are the following two questions:

- What would the Good Society look like—i.e., what would be its “shape”?
- How do we get from here to there?

I addressed the first question (if but briefly) in the previous section, so that the next task is to address the second one. First, however, it will be useful to begin with a series of additional basic assumptions that pertain specifically to the nature of our society as it exists currently:

- The existing society is *by no means* the Good Society. (Indeed, a number of years ago Erich Fromm, in his *The Sane Society*, 1955, questioned the very *sanity* of our society!)
- Societies are systems (whose individual components are interrelated). At any given time, however, some particular sector of the society tends to be dominant, with the other sectors serving subservient roles with reference to that dominant sector. At present (and for several centuries), the Economy is the dominant sector, and all other sectors (including the political, knowledge/education, and religion ones) serve the needs of the Economy. (Note that the introduction of the steam engine had—as I pointed out earlier—tremendous societal implications; however, this introduction simply increased the dominance of the Economy sector; it did not result in some other sector emerging to dominance.)
- The driving force within a society (including in the development of its technology) is the prevailing worldview. This is not to say, however, that one or more other (and even countervailing) worldviews are not present within a society (and are even integral to the functioning of that society). For example, Thorstein Veblen, in one of his (typically) brilliant articles (“Industrial and Pecuniary Employments,” 1900) (and a subsequent book, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, 1904), distinguished between industrial and pecuniary employments, argued that a *de facto* mentality was associated with the former and a *de jure* mentality with the second, and in effect argued that both mentalities were integral to the functioning of United States society—a sort of ecological mutualism, in other words.
- If the prevailing worldview within the United States’s societal system can be characterized, briefly, as one of *competitive individualism*, the prevailing worldview in the New Order would be something distinctively different. Perhaps we could say, e.g., that an approximation of the “love God and neighbor” worldview would prevail in the New Order.
- If the New Order is thought of as a society of eco-communities, and a “love God and neighbor” worldview is associated with that society, it follows that one cannot think of societal system change as involving *just* institutional change. Once we recognize this, the question arises: How do we get *both* institutional change (i.e., a shift to eco-communities as the key element of the New Order’s “institutional furniture,” to use a term borrowed from Thorstein Veblen) *and* worldview change (of the right sort)?

Conventional thinking has been dichotomous on this matter. It has stated either that what’s necessary is to focus on “converting” individuals, one at a time, so that at some point in time a “critical mass” will be reached such that institutional change will occur virtually automatically; or that institutional change must occur first (via private and/or governmental efforts), and that as people live within a new institutional context, they will develop an appropriate worldview.

Both of those views are flawed, so far as I am concerned, however. The first one is naive in that it fails to recognize a truth, expressed brilliantly by Veblen (in *The Theory of the*

Leisure Class, 1899) decades ago: “All classes are in a measure engaged in the pecuniary struggle, and in all classes the possession of the pecuniary traits counts towards the success and survival of the individual.” In other words, so long as one is living within the context of the existing “institutional furniture,” it is necessary for one to have a worldview that enables one to at least *survive* within the society. If one is willing to occupy a lower rung within the existing organizational structure, one can survive with a New Order worldview; but one cannot be *successful* in our society with such a worldview (unless one inherits wealth). And the second view is naive in a “city on a hill” sense. That is, the second argument seems to assume that if you build an ideal community-society, “they will come.” That because this community-society offers, so transparently, an ideal way of life, people will flock to it—and there won’t even be a need to work out any strategy for getting a proliferation of such communities (to the point where the society becomes one of Ideal Communities—and that shortly after people begin living in those communities they will develop a New Order worldview).

The strategy that I have developed combines ideas from both of the above perspectives, and is based on the following specific assumptions:

- Most in our society lack a New Order worldview—for the simple reason that the “institutional furniture” of our society militates against this.
- Some in our society *do* (for whatever reasons) have some semblance of a New Order worldview—at least in that they consciously *value* such a worldview, even though they are unable to live by such a worldview to the extent that they would like.
- It is people in *that* category who must form the vanguard in creating the New Order.
- Those in that category are usefully (for the purposes of my strategy) placed into two subgroups: (1) retirees (i.e., people with incomes independent of jobs); and (2) middle-aged adults with entrepreneurial skills.

The strategy I have developed sees the process of change in terms of stages (“waves”); and in terms of some key concepts of migration theory, the “waves” involve, successively, pull, push, pull, push, and drag. Here (briefly) are the “waves” I envision:

- Wave One consists of retirees willing to create (or have created) Cooperative Eco-Communities (CECs) for themselves and other retirees.
- Wave Two involves retirees who are attracted to CECs more for “push” than “pull” reasons—but the point is that they *are* willing to move to a CEC (perhaps one that they have helped design/build). They may be willing to move because they don’t feel safe in their neighborhood, because they can no longer afford to live where they are, etc.
- Wave Three consists of middle-aged adults interested in building a society of eco-communities (perhaps including some Ecological Company Towns [ECTs]), and having entrepreneurial skills. That is, people able to create businesses (ones appropriate for the New Order, it must be emphasized) able to attract working class people as employees.

- Wave Four would include people who, prior to moving to an eco-community, would be categorized as “working class, but who would lose that “status” upon moving to an eco-community. For even an ECT would be relatively democratic in its governance; even an ECT would be relatively egalitarian sociologically. As with Wave Two, those attracted to an eco-community during this “wave” would be responding to “push” factors (such as inadequate income, the feeling of inferiority imposed on most in the existing society, etc.); but, again, the point is that they *do* decide to move to an eco-community. And in doing so they would find that their worldview begins to become more of a New Order one as they begin to acquire a different way of life. (The same would occur, of course, with those associated with Wave Two.)

I should perhaps add here that David Callahan, in his recent review article (“Squeezed From the Bottom,” *Democracy*, Fall 2008), lends support to the view that many “average”—and even above average—people in our society today may be on the verge of abandoning the Existing Order in favor of an eco-communitarian one.

- I assume that some of those associated with eco-communities would be “evangelists” in that they would be working actively for a proliferation of eco-communities. I also assume that those involved with The Movement would, by virtue of being in the Movement, be withdrawing their purchasing activity, their labor, and their tax support from the Larger Society—for I assume that the communities comprising the emerging New Order would be striving to make that New Order (as a unit) as self-contained as possible, especially in economic terms. This means that at a certain point in the development of the New Order (relative to the existing one), those remaining in the Old Order, having lost their economic support, would be forced either to migrate from the United States to some other hierarchical society dominated by an elite, or to migrate to (i.e., be “dragged into”!) an eco-community in this society. The latter movement would constitute Wave Five. Of course, those not in the New Order might encourage migration to the United States, with the hope of exploiting migrants (as they are doing now). But insofar as that occurred, leaders in The Movement should strive to divert migrants to eco-communities (rather than attempting to “close the borders,” even though they might now have control over our political institutions). In a sense, what would occur is that as the New Order grows within the Existing Order—and at the expense of that Order—it acts as a cancer relative to the Existing Order, thereby killing it. As a result of the operation of market forces at that! So that no right-wing ideologues in our society would have reason to be critical of the process!

In concluding this section, I need to reiterate the point that I do not necessarily regard a society of eco-communities as either *possible*, or even entirely *desirable*, if possible. I don’t think it *possible* to create a society that consists *just* of eco-communities, because I see the prevailing worldview as powerful—and because I believe that there are societal system forces operating of which we are unaware, and which are beyond our control—ones which are not necessarily favorable to the creation of the New Order. (In fact, there have been times when I have been convinced—in part through my reading of Eugene Linden’s brilliant *Affluence and Discontent*, 1979—that Gaia, at some point in the past, “determined” to rid Earth of that pollutant—that

cancer—known as humankind, so that I have interpreted world history as an inexorable march toward catastrophe!)

I do not think such a society entirely *desirable*, first, because it would have limited productive capability; and, second, because it would not be able to defend itself against aggressive foreign societies (although one must admit, if honest, that most of the “terrorists” in the world were either trained by “us” or owe their “terrorist” nature to policies which our government has pursued). Nevertheless, I believe it *useful* to hold the ideal of a society of eco-communities in mind, for this can energize some “haves” (and perhaps some of the rest of us) to work for societal system change. And societal system change, I am convinced, is *necessary* if humankind is to *have* a future—societal system change *of the right sort*, it goes without saying. And not only on our shores, but *elsewhere* as well.

Addressing Objections

I herein identify, and address, three objections that come to mind.

Societal System Change is Simply Impossible

I can anticipate several objections to the above proposal, the first being that “you can’t turn back the hands of time.” The problem with this objection, however, is that it is “dimensionally challenged” in being dependent on the *time*, rather than *height*, dimension: it ignores the fact that we can think of the creation of a New Order as an *upward* advance rather than a *backward* retrogression. When a person gets sick, we don’t assume that the person is doomed. Rather, we assume that restoration to good health is usually possible—if not via the natural workings of one’s immune system, then with the aid of a physician. Likewise, when a society is—like ours—“sick,” we should assume that restoration to good health is possible, and then ask ourselves what needs to be done to achieve that goal. Perhaps use of the word “restore” instead of “return” would help us from being caught in the trap of thinking that we cannot restore what has been lost (i.e., a “natural” way of life).

Second, a more “compelling” argument here, perhaps, is the view that “human nature” is such as to doom my proposal—the view that humans are, by nature, “nasty” (as Thomas Hobbes [1588 – 1679] put it, and this militates against the success of my “plan.” However, the Hobbesian view had no merit when it was uttered, and has even less merit today: Hobbes should have been consigned to the dustbin decades ago. Modern research of an observational, experimental, historical, and archeological nature regarding humans has been providing contrary evidence, and the primatological research of such scholars as Frans de Waal (e.g., *Our Inner Ape*, 2005) has been pounding additional nails into Hobbes’s coffin. It’s becoming ever more clear that the “nastiness” that we can observe in contemporary humans is a function far more of their *societal* situations (i.e., the contextual factor) than their innate “natures.”

Third, an argument that has more direct pertinence for my “plan” is that during the nineteenth century especially a large number of “intentional” communities were created, but that all failed—so that any modern communitarian movement “must” also fail. It’s true, of course, that during the nineteenth century Shaker communities, Oneida, Economy, Ceresco, Ephraim, Bishop Hill, Bethel, the Amana “colonies,” Zoar, etc. were created, and most were short-lived (the Shaker communities lasting longest). And although their failure can be attributed to a variety of

causes, two stand out in particular: (1) they had leadership problems in that most had been founded by charismatic (and often very talented—e.g., “Father” Rapp) leaders, and when those leaders died the communities themselves began dying; and (2) the time was not “ripe” for the success of that type of settlement pattern. Communities created today should strive to develop a different leadership style; if they do, they have a good chance of being successful, for the situation today is much different than it was in the nineteenth century.

Finally, there is the question: Are there not *already* many “intentional” communities “out there”—not only in the United States, but elsewhere—and why, then, have they not been proliferating? It’s true that there is a Fellowship for Intentional Community, and this organization publishes *Communities* magazine and a *Communities Directory*. And there is also a Federation of Egalitarian Communities. Thus, there *are* dozens of intentional communities scattered across the United States, but it’s also true that only a small portion of our population lives in those communities. Why not more? Likely a variety of factors are involved here, among them that they haven’t been advertising themselves very well, so that in consequence few people are even aware of their existence. Another likely factor is that the communal movement of the 1960s has created an image, in the public mind, of these communities that is negative (e.g., they are “hippie” communities). Both problems may be related to the fact that contemporary communities lack a financial “backer” who is able to publicize the actual character of these communities, and promote their proliferation.

Of course, some of these communities are likely to have the problem that they *do* have characteristics that would make them unattractive to most Americans, had they knowledge of their attributes. Many Americans *do*, for example, have knowledge of the Amish, and perceive them as not only stuck in the past but conformist—with the additional problem that to join an Amish community one must have a certain background. Also, it’s likely that insofar as intentional communities *per se* are on the “mental maps” of Americans, they assume that many of them are Amish-like, and thereby unattractive—or filled with “hippies,” and unattractive for that reason.

Societal System Change is Possible, but Too Difficult

Related to the “impossible” objection is the “difficult” one—that changing something as massive as a society is too difficult a task to undertake. My answer to this objection, however, is that it is based on either questionable or unknown assumptions. In the first place, it seemingly is based on the assumption that because such a task is so huge, only the federal government has the capability of bringing about the change—and that getting the federal government to act on behalf of such change is “barking at the moon”—given that governments act at the behest of the Economy sector. However, my “program” is one that would not involve government at *any* level (except perhaps the local level—regarding zoning matters); given that it is dependent, rather, on private funding, there is more of a possibility of the “plan” being implemented, for only a few individuals with financial resources would be needed to “get the ball rolling.”

The “difficulty” objection, second, is also somewhat illusory in that the process would be a step-by-step one that began with the creation of one (or a few) small eco-communities, followed by a working for the proliferation of such communities. On the face of it this process would be a slow one. When, however, one considers the possibility that if, with each community created,

several members (after a short period of residence) would become leaders in the establishment of *other* communities, growth could occur at an exponential rate—and societal “conversion” could be accomplished within a fairly short period of time. It’s possible, of course, that in the meantime “runaway” would make life very difficult (if not impossible) for virtually everyone—whether one lived in an eco-community or not; but the future, strictly speaking, *cannot* be known with certainty, and we must proceed as if obstacles will not be encountered (including that of our extinction!).

An additional point that should be brought out here, however, is that given the CIA’s reputation for evil deeds—a reputation that is shared with other of our governmental organizations—there is also the possibility that if (or when) the CIA “gets wind” of The Movement, they will squelch it. After all, their orientation is so oriented to the short run—without any consideration of long-run consequences (such as “blowback”)—that they are unlikely to perceive that killing The Movement could very well eventuate in the extinction of our species (along with many others, of course). How to prevent this possibility? I wish I had the answer to this question.

Societal System Change Won’t Occur Because Your New Order is Unattractive

The point made in the previous subsection—that the process of change would be a step-by-step one—has considerable relevance for responding to this criticism. Were I advocating a mass movement (whether or not directed by the federal government), this criticism would have merit. But as I pointed out earlier, I see the process of change as involving a series of more-or-less discrete “waves”—there being a definite sequence in which the waves occur. (Which does not mean, of course, that the waves would not overlap.)

The fact that a *sequential process* is involved with my “plan” means that the process can be initiated by a small group, and this fact gives the plan plausibility as a workable one. In addition, it should be noted that the plan is based on certain very plausible assumptions regarding motivation, and that the sequence involved has a certain causal logic. The motivational assumptions and logic are (to repeat) that:

- Some people are already predisposed to find the plan attractive, and also have the means to act on that predisposition: they are not (e.g., because of being retired) tied down to a job, and have income that allows them to afford to act (after initial leadership has been provided by someone committed to the plan who also has the financial resources to proceed).
- Some are not “pulled” to the plan, but their living situation is such as to “push” them to some other alternative—such as the plan being recommended here. Given that they are not tied to a job, but have a sufficient income to afford to act on the “push” affecting them, potential exists that they can be attracted to The Movement.
- Although the initial communities created would lack an “economic base,” at some point those with entrepreneurial ability and a commitment to eco-community proliferation would begin creating economic activities within communities—with the principal intended “market” here being members of other communities that were a part of The Movement. That is, there would be an attempt to not only “build up” the New Order that

was emerging, but do so in a manner calculated to “starve”—and thereby weaken—the Larger Society, doing so by making the emerging New Order as self-sufficient as possible. The economic activities being created would be designed not so much for current residents, as new ones—the idea being that there are people “out there” who would find community living attractive, but because they need jobs and have families, they can only move to communities that will enable them to earn a living.

- Whereas the people in the third group would be “pulled” to communities because the characteristics some communities had made them not only attractive but enabled them to move, another contingent “out there” might feel “push” and therefore be willing to consider the eco-community option: they might find their current jobs boring, they might feel that they weren’t receiving sufficient respect, they might feel discriminated against, they might be living in a dangerous area, etc. Because some eco-communities offered employment to them, they might choose this option strictly for “push” reasons; and because they found life in the community they had chosen very satisfying, they might remain there.
- Contrary to the conventional wisdom view in our society (stated formally in the (Kingsley) Davis-(Wilbert) Moore thesis [1945]) that members of the elite are the most important members of our society, and therefore *deserve* to be in the elite (and rewarded accordingly), as more and more of the population became a part of the emerging New Order, the fallacy of this assumption would become ever more clear—and it would come to be realized that members of the elite are (to use ecological language) basically parasites and predators (who have, though, so “fixed” the societal structure that this is no longer very evident). The expansion of the New Order would have as its “flip” side a decrease in size of the “host” population—to the point that members of the elite would be faced with three options:
 - Start importing immigrants to serve as their new host.
 - Move to a different country—one that still has a hierarchical class society, and with a host population willing to accept them.
 - Move to an intentional community in the United States that was a part of the emerging New Order.

Insofar as they attempted to take the first course of action, one would hope that those in The Movement would counter it by diverting new immigrants to The Movement. If they wish *themselves* to emigrate, I say *bon voyage*. If, however, they would choose to join The Movement, one would hope that they would be welcomed into it—so long as they demonstrated “fitness” for eco-communitarian life.

In summary, no mass movement is necessary to bring about societal system change in our society—there is no need for a huge publicity campaign to convince a majority of the population that “this is the way to go.” Nor is there any need to convince our legislators of the merits of the “plan;” indeed, it would be foolish to try—not only because it’s unlikely that many would be “convinced,” but because Movement people would be true conservatives in believing in a

minimalist government. Perhaps Big Government has served us reasonably well in the past (certainly it has served the elite well!); it does not follow, however, that it can or will do so in the immediate future. Many readers of, e.g., *Democracy* may strongly disagree with this assessment, but if so, so be it: if you were to begin thinking *seriously* about the global warming threat, you might change your mind.

My plan is dependent upon someone stepping forward (or should I say “upward”!) to initiate the process, and I can only hope that someone *does*—and soon! There are, however, a few other points that I would like to make relative to the topic of this subsection, the first being that those involved in The Movement need to strive to make eco-communities not just places offering an ecologically-responsible way of life, but ones likely to be attractive to many people: communities within which respect is given to all, toleration is the order of the day, individuality is not only tolerated but prized and fostered, a certain set of beliefs is not required for membership, etc.

Second, a key component of conventional thinking must be exposed as fallacious, with this fallacy being made known as widely as possible. The fallacy to which I am referring is that “standard of living” should be thought of exclusively in materialistic terms—a fallacy rooted in part on the absurd assumption that only that which can be readily measured is worth thinking about. Although it’s true that we all need certain material things for survival (and most of those things—except for the air we breathe—are not freely available), and that certain material things can add to our comfort, there are intangibles that are also important—*highly* important, in fact. The list that I provided earlier represents an attempt to identify some of those intangibles.

It may very well be that the above-mentioned facts about well-being are basically ignored currently because the Existing Order is dependent for its very continuation on the myth that material things are the basis for well-being—a myth upon which the discipline of Economics is based. (Which implies that in the New Order either there will *be* no such discipline, or it will be a very different one!) Given that the Existing Order *cannot* continue indefinitely and because of that fact *must not* be allowed to continue much longer, there is hope that a greatly altered perspective on well-being will emerge before the century is out. Assuming, that is, that the human species doesn’t become extinct before 2100 arrives!

The final point that I would like to make relative to the attractiveness matter is that in advertising eco-communities that are to be part of The Movement it should be emphasized that becoming involved in The Movement can be an *adventure*. One prominent feature of the Existing Order is that life in it is, for many, stressful and/or boring—and not at all adventurous. At times, in fact, one must pinch oneself to assure oneself that one is still alive! We need to recover some of the adventurous spirit of the Vikings! True, they killed many people in the process, but rest assured that they only killed *bad* people! (Just kidding!—I can’t help it that I have a sense of humor. I need one, given the seriousness of the present!)

The first “wave” in my strategy would consist of retirees basically, and although many of today’s retirees are in good health (many have been able to retire at an early age), too many of them refrain from activities that would conduce a continuation of good mental and physical health. Too many spend their time playing cards, watching television, and the like. They could be using their time staying active by doing volunteer work or acquiring hobbies. Unfortunately, however,

nobody “out there” seems to be challenging them to become active, especially doing so in ways that would involve contributing to the health of our *society*. Therefore, I hope that those who assume the role of leadership in The Movement make a point of challenging those who might form the vanguard to get some adventure into their lives by becoming a part of The Movement—on the basis that they *need* adventure in their lives, and are being offered not only personal adventure but a role in doing something exceedingly important, not only for their society but for humankind itself.

Concluding Thoughts

The builders of a society that would enable and promote ecologically-responsible living while also offering a high level of material and (especially) psychological well-being to its citizens would be faced with many different decisions. Which is good, because too much of our lives involves a thoughtless perpetuation of habitual behavior: as humans, we need to be faced with challenges, and in a position where we are *required* to make decisions.

The pioneers of the New Order certainly would have many different kinds of decisions to make! For example, they will need to make decisions regarding what materials to use in creating structures; how to furnish them; how to provide structures with what is needed for food preparation and consumption, for the provision of potable water, for waste disposal; how to produce food and clothing; how to transport things; what institutions to create; etc. In the process of making such decisions, however, they must not neglect the psychological needs of people. If they give attention to all those factors that are involved in the creation of a Good New Order, there may be a chance that they will move us significantly in that direction—and that the future is not so disastrous as to witness our demise as a species, or at least its drastic decimation.

The results of their decision-making would, of course, produce a very different society: a society with a much more dispersed population; a society involving much less movement of both people and goods; a society with a much “flatter” social structure; a society with a much different occupational profile; etc. The main point, however, is that it would be a much *better* society—not only from the standpoint of near universal well-being, but from the standpoint of being more in tune with the rest of nature, and thereby offering the possibility that we humans will not become extinct after all. Especially if change occurs not only here, but elsewhere too.

To repeat: I do not foresee a radical reshaping of our society, and therefore do not perceive the above discussion as constituting a “blueprint” for the Next American Society. Rather, I offer the above discussion as a *vision* that can motivate people to act in a manner that will have “salvific” value, both in the sense of contributing to our continuing survival and to the (physical and psychological) well-being of humans—first in our society, then in other ones. Thus, I regard this essay not so much as a “contribution to the scholarly literature” than as a sort of “manifesto”—a piece written with the intent of motivating action in a certain direction. I now, then, pass the baton to those who will become so motivated.

Postscript

If a movement to create eco-communities gets underway, it is—as I have stated several times—unlikely that a complete “conversion” of our society would occur. What is more probable is that our society would simply become more dualistic in the sense of the development of more

subsocieties (i.e., eco-communities) within the larger society. The Existing Order would shrink in size relative to these subsocieties, but would not be entirely replaced as a consequence of this growth of subsocieties. Would I be satisfied if this occurred? Yes, provided that the Existing Order switched over to the use of non-polluting fuels (thereby reducing the risks associated with global warming), and some changes were made that would reduce the chance that individuals “possessed” with pathologies would (as occurs now) rise to positions of influence and power. The eco-community portion of the society would then contain those individuals who wished to have a way of life that accorded with their natures as humans, along with others who were having difficulty coping in the Existing Order. What *could* emerge, then, is a society wherein a high level of well-being was had by all and *per capita* use of fossil fuels was low to negligible.

This prospect of a Good Society that was more dualistic than at present calls to mind (for me at least) Alvin Toffler’s *Future Shock* (1970). This term was coined by Toffler, and first used by him in a 1965 *Horizons* article. By this term Toffler was referring to a phenomenon that was induced “in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.” (p. 2) In referring to change as “an elemental force,” Toffler implied that change was irresistible, a virtual law of nature. However, Toffler is ambivalent regarding the matter of change, for he then went on to state that we must learn “to control the rate of change” in our “personal affairs as well as in society at large” or “we are doomed to a massive adaptational breakdown.” (p. 2) Is the problem with change that too much has occurred or, rather, that it’s merely that the *rate* of change has been too fast? Toffler is not clear on this matter, but it would seem that he believes that (1) change is inevitable, (2) it’s the rate of change that’s the problem, and that (3) although change *per se* cannot be halted, at least the *rate* of change can be reduced.

Toffler’s attitude toward those having difficulty coping is also ambivalent. On the one hand his attitude seems to be Social Darwinian in that he seems to see those able to cope as the “fit” and others as “unfit.” On the other hand, however, he seems to have some degree of compassion for the “unfit” in that he devotes Chapter 17 (“Coping With Tomorrow,” pp. 319 – 341) to a number of different coping strategies: Direct Coping, Personal Stability Zones, Situational Grouping, Crisis Counseling, Half-Way Houses, Enclaves of the Past, Enclaves of the Future, and Global Space Pageants.

Where he comes closest to perceiving the future in dualistic terms is in his Enclaves of the Past, which are communities “in which turnover, novelty and choice are deliberately limited.” (p. 335) Life in these communities would be slow-paced, more relaxed, less stimulating (i.e., dull!). Toffler comes close to saying that such communities would contain the slow-witted dregs of society—so that it is obvious that his sympathies lie with those with an ability to cope. Given this, his variety of compassion is of a peculiar sort—but one not unknown in the history of the West. Toffler adds that such communities should not be derided but, rather, “should be subsidized by the larger society as a form of mental and social insurance.” (p. 336). Thus, the people living in such communities have no value in themselves; rather, they house unimportant people as if these communities were mental wards (!), and are good to have in the society as a sort of insurance for those living in the larger society.

This condescending attitude toward the residents of Enclaves of the Past differs greatly from my attitude toward the residents of CECs and ECTs! Rather than seeing such people as unimportant I see them as playing a “savior” (or at least vanguard) role—in helping save humanity from

ecocatastrophe. And in being places where individuals are able to live in accord with our “design specifications” as humans, they are places where true humanity can be preserved. If I might be facetious for a moment, communities of this sort can be perceived as zoos within which true humans live; so that if a member of the larger society wants to learn the true nature of humans, s/he can visit one of these communities! In addition, rather than perceiving these communities as housing dullards, I see them as housing a real variety of people, people who have learned to live together in harmony—some of these individuals being very creative (and in a variety of ways), others having other skills that these subsocieties can use.

Given that Toffler’s book was written at a time before global warming became a part of public consciousness, it is not surprising that it shows no awareness of the threat posed by that phenomenon. And if the book also shows no awareness of the Discrepancy concept, the reason for that is that that concept is *still* not a part of the public consciousness. Toffler’s perspective on coping, by the way, seems to be that insofar as one is unable to cope well, the problem lies within oneself. This view is a rational one if one is referring to people living in a society within which they are able to live in accord with their “design specifications”—a society that is either not changing (an unlikely situation), or changing at a slow pace. But there *is* such a thing as a society that is changing at too fast a pace, and in this case it becomes rational to believe that insofar as individuals are not coping well, the cause is *external* rather than internal. That is, the problem is *the societal system* itself: the society’s institutions have not only allowed change to occur at too rapid a pace, but have not been modified—i.e., *adapted*—from the standpoint of keeping the well-being level within the society at as high a level as possible.

Were Toffler re-writing this book today, would he give it a different tone? Likely he would give attention to the global warming threat, but I doubt that he would bring the Discrepancy concept into his discussion. More generally, I suspect that Toffler would continue his lack of sensitivity to people’s biologically-based needs, and his habit of thinking of individuals in *quantitative* terms (i.e., possessing more or less). In addition, his statement that we may “want to pay people *not* to use the latest goods, not to *enjoy* [italics added] the most automated and sophisticated conveniences,” (p. 336) suggests that he is “possessed” with the view that people especially gain well-being from the consumption of goods—new ones in particular—and therefore has a very different perspective on what gives people satisfaction than is presented in the present essay.

Something other than conventional thinking is needed today—regarding what individual humans need for well-being, and what humans as a species need for continued survival. Unfortunately, the hold that such thinking has on those in our society with the capability to bring about positive change in our society is such as to give one little hope for the future. It’s enough to make a person weep (if I might make a Biblical allusion)!

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An Alternative to Social Darwinism

Alton C. Thompson

Abstract

My intentions are twofold in this paper. First, I provide a philosophical argument that can provide a basis for developing *specific* ideas for bringing about societal system change. Second, I attribute the initiation of this philosophy to Thorstein Veblen, and use a series of quotations from two of his works to support this claim.

This philosophy that I attribute to Veblen does not appear to have been noticed by others. Perhaps this is because elements of the philosophy are scattered in Veblen's writings, and therefore not presented in a coherent fashion. However, so far as Veblen's writings have relevance for today, it is this philosophy which may represent his most important contribution! Given that the philosophy is of a subversive nature, it is not surprising that it still has not been developed well.

I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life.

-Deuteronomy 30:19

. . . we find do-gooders throughout Africa and elsewhere attempting to destroy a system whose wealth is shared by all, where orphans and aged are cared for, and to replace this system with the 'screw your buddy' ethics of the West.[1]

-Eugene Linden, *Affluence and Discontent*, 1979, p. 97.

We have not only taken the wrong course (although it is more accurate to state that we have *drifted* onto that course rather than chosen it). We have perverted our intellects by developing strategies to hide that fact from ourselves—e.g., by diverting our attention to other matters. In addition, we have concocted intellectual constructs “designed” (if but unconsciously) to convince ourselves that our deviant course is actually the correct one—the “philosophy” of Social Darwinism being the currently-dominant one.

I will readily admit that I use this term unfairly here in that (a) the “philosophy” that I am alluding to here predates the life of Charles Darwin [1809 – 1882]; for example, the development of Christianity can be regarded as an early version of this perverse “philosophy.”[2] (b) Darwin himself was not a Social Darwinist—although he was to a degree (perhaps unwittingly), and modern Social Darwinism is rooted (if but only logically) in the “survival of the fittest” phrase that he first used in the fifth edition (1869) of *The Origin of Species*. [3] (c) It is possible that few of the promoters of the philosophy that I am referring to as Social Darwinism were actually influenced by Darwin's writings—either directly or indirectly. (So far as I am aware, no scholarly research has been undertaken that establishes how frequently those who espoused the

values that I herein associate with “Social Darwinism” either cited Darwin or used terms/phrases associated with Darwin—such as, most notably, “survival of the fittest.”) However, despite these facts (along with the fact that the term has been given a variety of meanings), the fact that the term is widely known today and the meanings given to it today are rather close one to another, enables me to feel justified in applying the label “Social Darwinism” to the particular “philosophy” to which I am alluding.[4]

My contentions in this essay are that:

- Social Darwinism (as I define it for the purposes of this essay) is the ruling philosophy in this society—rather than, e.g., the Golden Rule (which is the virtual opposite philosophy—an ironic fact given that this claims to be a Christian society!).[5]
- It *is*, however, a philosophy that is compatible with Christianity, for as Christianity conquered the world, the world conquered Christianity. That is, rather than Christianity retaining the value system taught by Jesus it diverted attention from that philosophy; by shifting the focus from correct *behavior* (orthopraxy) to correct *belief* (orthodoxy); it became an accommodationist religion that remained oriented to Jesus only in name. In fact, it failed to do even that, for it preferred the title “Christ” for Jesus, and came to perceive him not so much as “Messiah” (the literal meaning of “Christ”) as a “savior” in the sense of the saviors associated with the Greek Mystery religions that were popular in the centuries BCE down to the early centuries of the common era. Indeed, one can argue that Christianity itself became a Mystery religion.
- It is a philosophy that is contrary to human nature—while claiming to be one that, rather, *expresses* human nature.

Given the latter point combined with the fact that it is the ruling philosophy in our society, it is no wonder that we have so many problems—both we as citizens of the United States, and of the world. Indeed, one can argue that virtually all of our problems as humans stem from our way of life and the philosophy that supports it.

Some would claim, of course, that Social Darwinism is a dead philosophy, and has been for some time. I would disagree, however, and point out two facts about our society that suggest that our way of life is *not* in accord with human nature but, rather, is driven by a Social Darwinian philosophy: (a) our obsession with competitive sports;[6] and (b) the fact that our society is highly inegalitarian. Were our society one in which everyone had a way of life that was in accord with human nature, competitive sports would play a minor—or even non-existent—role; well-being (physical and mental) would be widespread; and the society would be relatively egalitarian. Our society is none of these—all indications that the ruling philosophy in our society is *not* one directed by a philosophy that is compatible with human nature. Indications, also, that our society is by no means a “Jesuan” one (while, however, being a “Christian” one—nothing to brag about, however).

In making the claim that Social Darwinism is our guiding philosophy I am implying that human nature is positive, not negative. And although this truism likely would be disbelieved by most in our society,[7] what this reflects is the effects of propaganda, and unawareness of the abundance

of a body of very varied research that converges on the conclusion that human nature is positive. Exploration of that research here would take me too far afield from my objectives for this essay. I would, however, like to make reference to the recent discovery that we humans are programmed with a mirror neuron system (MNS) that, if allowed to operate, will result in positive behavior. The problem is that we have allowed “philosophical” (and other—including residential patterns, as Frederick Engels pointed out decades ago) developments to occur which, when followed, interfere with the operation of this system and, rather, result in negative behaviors.

Behind *those* sorts of development, in turn, is what sociobiologist David P. Barash has termed a “discrepancy.”[8] The ideas behind this concept are as follows:

- Prior to the Agricultural Revolution, thousands of years ago, there occurred a co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life; as a consequence, humans fit their way of life, and their way of life (centered on the economic activities of gathering and hunting) fit them as biological entities.
- With the Agricultural Revolution that way of life began to change, whereas human biology remained basically the same.
- The change in way of life meant that changes were occurring in (a) the stimuli to which people were exposed, (b) the substances they ingested, and (c) the behaviors in which they were engaging.
- That is, a *discrepancy* was beginning to occur in the way of life for which humans had become “designed” (via the operation of several selection mechanisms—but *not* including Darwinian “natural selection”) and the way of life that they were actually living—a change that was not planned or chosen but, rather, just “happened.” (Which is not to say, however, that a rational explanation for this “event” is not possible.)
- Because humans were now living an increasingly “unnatural” way of life, the results were increased ill-being, increased pathological behavior, which, in turn, meant more ill-being, etc. Another sort of development was that of intellectual systems that rationalized the existence of the hierarchical societies and inegalitarianism that were developing.
- However, a contrary sort of development also occurred that attempted (in effect) to restore the old “natural” way of life—with the development of a “prophetic” movement in Israel being the part of it most known to us (and rarely understood for what it actually was!). (One needs to read the works of, e.g., Thomas L. Thompson to gain a proper understanding in this realm.)

Although the Discrepancy, in a sense, has played a *role* in human history for centuries (a fact implicit in the Linden book referred to earlier), one could argue that it could arise as an *explicit* concept only after the concept of biological evolution had appeared on the scene—and I would argue that the Discrepancy concept (as a *concept*, at any rate) goes back specifically to Thorstein Veblen [1857 – 1929]—certainly one of the most brilliant intellectuals that the United States has produced to date. I would argue for the following specific line of development:

- Darwin published *The Origin of Species* (1859).
- Thomas H. Huxley [1825 – 1895] published “The Struggle for Existence in Human Society” in the February 1888 issue of *The Nineteenth Century*. In this article Huxley wrote that animal life was characterized by conflict between conspecifics and that, likewise, early human society was “a continual free fall,” with a (Thomas) “Hobbesian war of each against all”
- Prince Peter Kropotkin [1842 – 1921] published a series of articles in that periodical from September 1890 to June 1896 (published in 1902 as *Mutual Aid*) that objected to Huxley’s over-emphasis on competition at the expense of cooperation. (Some editions of Kropotkin’s book include a copy of Huxley’s article.)
- Various writings by Thorstein Veblen were published—two of which are quoted in Section II below—which appear to have been partially inspired by Kropotkin’s writing, and which introduce the Discrepancy concept in incipient form.

As my primary intention here is to argue that the Discrepancy concept can be traced back to Thorstein Veblen, which concept—with its implications for behavior—is in opposition to those associated with Social Darwinism, what I wish to do in this essay is (a) present a definition of Social Darwinism that conveys the generally-accepted meaning of the term today, while presenting a more precise definition—and also arguing for the fact that the philosophy derives (at least logically) from the “survival of the fittest” phrase; and (b) present an alternate philosophy—what I term “Restoratism”—that has its roots in the Discrepancy concept. Whereas Social Darwinism is an *ideological* concept—i.e., is one that is supportive of the Existing Order, with its hierarchical class system, exploitation, etc.—the Restoratism concept might be termed a “utopian” concept. Not, however, in the sense that it refers to a state that cannot be attained but, rather, in the sense of referring to a state that *should* be striven for if we have any hope of becoming a just society within which well-being prevails—and, in fact, any hope of surviving beyond the current century!

A Definition of “Social Darwinism”

The meaning that I develop in this section for “Social Darwinism” is one that I derive from the phrase “survival of the fittest” that Darwin first used in the fifth edition (1869) of *The Origin of Species*, and the first point that I would like to make is that it does not translate readily into the human realm; because of this, it has therefore been interpreted as “*success* of the fittest.” That terminology has rarely been used, however, perhaps to disguise the actual meaning being given the term—and convey the pretense that a scientific principle is being stated. Given this interpretation of “survival of the fittest,” the further interpretation has been given that the higher one’s income, the greater one’s innate ability. The actual reasoning here, though, is the reverse—that the greater one’s innate ability, the greater will be one’s income. So that given this relationship, if one knows a given person’s income relative to others in the society, one can *infer* from this datum the person’s relative ability—it being assumed, of course, that the ability is the cause of the success, not the other way around. The ability in question is usually thought of as “intelligence” (measured in such a way that it will tend to correlate highly with income!), but may also be thought of as athletic ability, acting talent, etc.

“Survival of the fittest” is not, however, ever thought of as simply a *description* of “the way of the world.” It is also a term with normative overtones. In fact, I object to the phrase not only because of its obvious falseness as a description (i.e., its assumption that success is a function of, and only of, innate ability) but its *normative* implications—which are ones that violate both secular and religious ethical systems that are widely accepted.

What perceptions, value judgments, and behaviors are permitted—even enjoined—implicitly in the phrase “survival of the fittest”? First, there is the perception that people vary not so much in kind (i.e., *qualitatively*) as in degree (i.e., *quantitatively*). Now if differences between people are perceived as of primarily a quantitative nature and as also having their basis in biological inheritance, one’s next task is to specify that variable(s) which has especial significance in differentiating one individual from another—the variable(s) for which numerical values need to be obtained. The variable usually chosen for “service” here is “intelligence;” and if that is not actually measured, income is used as a proxy. (As I noted earlier, if “intelligence” *is* measured, an operational procedure is concocted that enables a strong correlation between the “intelligence” measure and income—and this is called intellectual honesty!)

Having decided that “success of the fittest” means that those with the highest income are the “fittest” (i.e., those with the most innate ability), it is, first, now clear that those with low income are also *inferior* to those with more—i.e., they are deficient biologically. This judgment regarding those with a low income leads quite naturally, next, to certain judgments as to how one should *act* toward those with lower incomes—how A should act toward B, B to C, C to D, etc. (So that in principle, at least, virtually everyone has a basis for “acting against” some others!)

What might this “doing onto” others involve?

- Refrain from doing anything that would add to the well-being of inferiors.
- Encourage the emigration of inferiors from the country to some other country.
- Discourage the in-migration of inferiors into the country.

If these latter actions are not very successful—and even if they are—work for the segregation (via some form of incarceration) and/or sterilization of the “inferior” so they cannot pollute the society with more of their kind (i.e., people with “bad genes.” After all, they *do* pose a threat to the society given that they reproduce at a higher rate than do “normal” people.

- Insofar as the above efforts are not successful, so that the inferior must be tolerated, feel free to exploit them to the fullest extent possible.
- As a last resort—and to best protect the population from genetic pollution—kill many of the inferiors. Don’t kill them all, however, because the labor of some of them is needed for many of the society’s necessary jobs—e.g., garbage collectors, building cleaners, retail clerks, security officers, etc.

There are many subtly different concepts of Social Darwinism, some more pernicious than others; and many of those who have pernicious ideas have had as their source one other than Darwin. However, in this essay I have defined the term in a way that represents a common understanding of it in this society, except that the attitudes, non-actions, and actions that I have identified as objectionable I lump together as “Social Darwinian,” regardless of the origins of those sorts of ideas held by a particular person.

The Discrepancy Concept and Restoratism

Although I attribute the Discrepancy concept to Veblen, along with the (weakly-stated) hint that Restoratism be developed, I attribute the *seed* for this development to Kropotkin’s discussion of the importance for cooperative behavior as a virtual law of nature. The reasoning that I attribute to Veblen is that **if early human behavior was characterized by cooperative behavior, [9] given that humans today are basically the same, biologically, as they were thousands of years ago, it follows that today’s way of life is not a natural one—and must, therefore, be having negative consequences for its “inmates.” Given this, it should be replaced with a more natural one.**

What I do below, then, is develop the Discrepancy-Restoratism argument, and honor Veblen as the “father” of this argument by supporting it with quotations drawn from Veblen’s works. In an effort to keep the essay relatively short, I draw quotations from just two of Veblen’s works, “[Christian Morals](#) and the Competitive System” (1910)) and *The [Instinct](#) of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914). The first will be referred to below as “CM,” the latter as “IW.” If a quotation does not appear under a given point, what this signifies is either that I have placed a relevant quotation(s) under some other point(s), or the point itself represents a “missing link” (!) in Veblen’s reasoning that I am supplying for the sake of making the argument complete.

The Argument

1. Contemporary “savages” (the term used a century ago to refer to gatherer-hunter peoples) have been found to engage primarily in positive behaviors (e.g., working cooperatively with others) relative to others in the group, as well as neutral activities (e.g., conversing and/or joking with others in the group).

“While this [“the principle of brotherly love, or the impulse to mutual service”] seems to be a characteristic trait of Christian morals and may serve as a specific mark by which to distinguish this morality from the greater non-Christian cults, it is apparently a trait which Christendom shares with many of the obscurer cultures, and which does not in any higher degree characterise Christendom than it does these other, lower cultures. In the lower, non-Christian cultures, particularly among the more peaceable communities of savages, something of the kind appears to prevail by mere force of hereditary propensity; at least it appears, in some degree, to belong to these lower civilisations without being traceable to special teaching or to a visible interposition of divine grace. And in an obscure and dubious fashion, perhaps sporadically, it recurs throughout the life of human society with such an air of ubiquity [this statement appears to have been influenced by Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid*—ACT] as would argue that it is an elemental trait of the species, rather than a cultural product of Christendom. It may not be an overstatement to say that this principle is, in its elements, in

some sort an atavistic trait, and that Christendom comes by it through a cultural reversion to the animus of the lower (peaceable) savage culture.” [CM]

“the lower cultures, where the hereditary traits of the species should presumably assert themselves” [CM]

“The Christian principles inculcate brotherly love, mutual succor: Love thy neighbor as thyself; *Mutuum date, nihil inde sperantes*. This principle seems, in its elements at least, to be a culturally atavistic trait, belonging to the ancient, not to say primordial, peaceable culture of lower savagery.” [CM]

“the golden rule of the peaceable savage has never lost the respect of occidental mankind, and its hold on men’s convictions is, perhaps, stronger now than at any earlier period of the modern time.” [CM] [Wishful thinking?!—ACT]

“Its [renunciation’s] companion principle, brotherly love or mutual service, appears, in its elements at least, to be a very deep rooted and ancient cultural trait, due to an extremely protracted experience of the race in the early stages of human culture, reinforced and defined by the social conditions prevalent in the early days of Christianity.” [CM]

“the impulsive bias of brotherly love” [CM]

2. We can infer from this fact that prior to the Agricultural Revolution—when only “savage” humans existed—similar behavior prevailed with the humans of the time.

3. Given that with the “savages” of the pre-Agricultural Revolution period we can assume that there had been co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life (with associated behavior patterns, stimuli to which exposed, types of substances ingested), we can conclude that the behaviors these individuals engaged in expressed the human nature that had developed.

4. With the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life (with associated institutions) began to develop, and with them new behavior patterns. (In addition there occurred changes in the stimuli to which humans were becoming exposed, and in that which humans began to ingest—e.g., for sustenance.)

5. However, human biology remained relatively unchanged over time. Because human biology was not changing, humans were now engaging in some behaviors contrary to their human nature (and also being exposed to “unnatural” stimuli, and ingesting “unnatural” substances).

“A surviving mutant type is necessarily suited more or less closely to the circumstances under which it emerged and first made good its survival, and it is presumably less suited to any other situation.” [IW]

“Changes in the institutional structure are continually taking place in response to the altered discipline of life under changing cultural conditions, but human nature remains specifically the same.” [IW]

“But there is no warrant for assuming that each or any of these successive changes in the scheme of institutions affords successively readier, surer or more facile ways and means for the instinctive proclivities to work out their ends, or that this sequence of change is more suitable to the untroubled functioning of these instincts than any phase that has gone before. Indeed, the presumption is the other way.” [IW]

“the fitness of any given type of human nature for life after the manner and under the conditions imposed by any later phase in the growth of culture is a matter of less and less secure presumption the farther the sequence of institutional change has departed from that form of savagery which marked the initial stage in the life-history of the given racial stock.” [IW]

“history records more frequent and more spectacular instances of the triumph of imbecile institutions over life and culture than of peoples who have by force of instinctive insight saved themselves alive out of a desperately precarious institutional situation” [IW]

“changes come rarely—in effect, not at all—in the endowment of instincts whereby mankind is enabled to employ these means [e.g., “technological ways and means”] and to live under the institutions which its habits of life have cumulatively created.” [IW]

6. We moderns still have the same basic human nature as our “savage” ancestors did, but our ways of life (with associated institutions, etc.) result in behavior patterns that are far more deviant than were those of, e.g., the early agriculturalists.

7. Because our modern way of life (with its particular institutions, etc.) requires us to engage in behaviors that are contrary to ones that would be in accord with human nature, the resulting “discrepancy” (to use a word introduced by sociobiologist David P. Barash) has various negative consequences for us: it precipitates pathological behaviors (involving harm to others and/or oneself), physical illnesses (including ones of a psychosomatic nature), mental problems, etc. (For an excellent “checklist” of relevance here, see S. Boyd Eaton *et al.*, *The Paleolithic Prescription*, 1988, pp. 279 – 83.)

“But such an animus as best comports with the logic of the machine process does not, it appears, for good or ill, best comport with the native strain of human nature in those peoples subject to its discipline. In all the various peoples of Christendom there is a visible straining against the drift of the machine’s teaching, rising at time and in given classes of the population to the pitch of revulsion.

“It is apparently among the moderately well-to-do, the half-idle classes, that such a revulsion chiefly has its way; leading now and again to fantastic, archaising cults and beliefs and to make-believe credence in occult insights and powers. At the same time, and with the like tincture of affectation and make-believe, there runs through much of the community a feeling of maladjustment and discomfort, that seeks a remedy in a ‘return to Nature’ in one way or another; some sort of return to ‘the simple life,’ which shall in some fashion afford an escape from the unending ‘grind’ of living from day to day by the machine method and shall so put behind us for a season the burdensome futilities by help of which alone life can be carried on under the routine of the machine process.” [IW]

“This growing recourse to vacations should be passably conclusive evidence to the effect that neither the manner of life enforced by the machine system, nor the occupations of those who are in close contact with this technology and its due habits of thought, can be ‘natural’ to the common run of civilised mankind.” [IW]

“According to accepted theories of heredity, civilised mankind should by native endowment be best fit to live under conditions of a moderately advanced savagery, such as the machine technology will not permit. Neither in the physical conditions which it imposes, therefore, nor in the habitual ways of observation and reasoning which it requires in the work to be done, is the machine age adapted to the current native endowment of the race. And these various movements of unrest and revulsion are evidence, for as much as they are worth, that such is the case.

Not least convincing is the fact that a considerable proportion of those who are held unremittingly to the service of the machine process ‘break down,’ fall into premature decay. Physically and spiritually these modern peoples are better adapted to life under conditions radically different from those imposed by this modern technology.” [IW]

“The limit of tolerance native to the race, physically and spiritually, is short of that unmitigated materialism and unremitting mechanical routine to which the machine technology incontinently drives.” [IW]

“Laymen seek respite in the fog of occult and esoteric faiths and cults, and so fall back on the will to believe things of which the senses transmit no evidence; while the learned and studious are, by stress of the same ‘aching void,’ drawn into speculative tenets of ostensible knowledge that purport to go nearer to the heart of reality, and that elude all mechanistic proof or disproof.” [IW]

“Neither the manner of life imposed by the machine process, nor the manner of thought inculcated by habituation to its logic will fall in with the free movement of the human spirit, born, as it is, to fit the conditions of savage life. So there comes an irrepressible—in a sense, congenital—recrudescence of magic, occult science, telepathy, spiritualism, vitalism, pragmatism.” [IW] [And much more!—ACT]

8. Still, because humans continue to have the same basic biology that they had when “savagery” prevailed, from time to time (and especially within certain classes of people) behavior in accord with human nature occurs on a fairly widespread scale.

[Note: Twice in “Christian Morals” Veblen used the term “mutual aid,” suggesting that he was familiar with Prince Peter Kropotkin’s book with that title (published in 1902, but based on a series of articles published several years earlier in *The Nineteenth Century*, an important periodical of the time. Kropotkin had written the articles to respond to an earlier article in the same periodical by Thomas H. Huxley.) Veblen may also have been familiar with other of Kropotkin’s works, such as *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1924)—for, after all, Veblen was a well-read man—and died five years after the latter was published. Insofar as Veblen was familiar with Kropotkin’s works, he would have learned of “mutual aid”

behavior in both the animal and human realms—some of it resulting from Kropotkin’s own research in Siberia.]

[At the time of the origin of Christianity:] “The pride of caste and all the principles of differential dignity and honor fell away, and left mankind naked and unashamed and free to follow the promptings of hereditary savage human nature [,] which make for fellowship and Christian charity. Barring repressive conventionalities, reversion to the spiritual state of savagery is always easy; for human nature is still substantially savage. The discipline of savage life, selective and adaptive, has been by far the most protracted and probably the most exacting of any phase of culture in all the life-history of the race; so that by heredity human nature still is, and must indefinitely continue to be, savage human nature. This savage spiritual heritage that ‘springs eternal’ when the pressure of conventionality is removed or relieved, seems highly conducive to the two main traits of Christian morality, though more so to the principle of brotherly love than to that of renunciation [or “humility,” “abnegation”].” [CM] [Note here that although Veblen used the word “selective” he did not refer to Darwin’s “natural selection”—ACT]

[Although the brotherly love principle that operated with the early Christians has lost much of its force, “being currently represented by a thrifty charity, and, perhaps, by the negative principle of fair play, neither of which can fairly be rated as a competent expression of the Christian spirit.”] “Yet this principle is forever reasserting itself in economic matters, in the impulsive approval of whatever conduct is serviceable to the common good and in the disapproval of disserviceable conduct even within the limits of legality and natural right.” [CM]

[The historical development of a period during which “handicraft and petty trade” were the dominant features of the economy involved, one might argue] “a qualified or mitigated (sophisticated) return to the spirit of savagery, or at least as a spiritual reversion looking in that direction, though by no means abruptly reaching the savage plane.” [IW] [A brilliant point! Is it possible that the frontier experience in the United States had somewhat the same effect? Did, e.g., Frederick Jackson Turner hint at this?—ACT]

“That the eighteenth-century system of Natural Rights allows . . . a degree of approximation to the scheme of rights and obligations observed among many primitive peoples need flutter no one’s sense of cultural consistency. Return to Nature was more or less of a password in the closing period of the era of handicraft and after, and in respect of this system of civil relations it appears that the popular attitude of that time was in effect something of a reversion to primitive habits of thought; though it was at best a partial return to a ‘state of nature,’ in the sense of a state of peace and industry rather than a return to the unsophisticated beginnings of society.” [IW] [I believe that Veblen was alluding here to the Romantic Movement—ACT]

“It is not that the era of handicraft was an era of reversion to savagery, but only that the tone-giving factor in the community of that time reverted, by force of the state of the industrial arts, to habits of peace and industry, in which direct and detailed manual work takes a leading place.” [IW]

9. There is therefore hope that such behavior can come to the fore again, on a widespread scale, if the circumstances are right.

“Except for a possible reversion to a cultural situation strongly characterised by ideals of emulation and status, the ancient racial bias embodied in the Christian principle of brotherhood should logically continue to gain ground at the expense of the pecuniary morals of competitive business.” [CM]

10. What are those “circumstances”?

The right institutional situation (among other factors), would be my answer. Veblen was silent on this matter, but the fact that he perceived the “savage” way of life as “natural” and regarded that way of life as normative means that he would have been supportive of institutions that permitted, and even conduced, behaviors characteristic of “savagery”—and perhaps also insisted that we humans still need exposure to the sorts of stimuli to which our ancient ancestors were exposed, and still need to ingest the sorts of substances that they did. (Relative to this latter point, I find it of interest that *The Paleolithic Prescription* book referred to earlier emphasizes diet.)

What Do We Do With This Argument?

If the maltreatment (to the point of killing them), in good conscience, of one’s fellow human beings is “authorized” by Social Darwinism, what are the implications of Restoratism? Let me here identify some of the salient features of this alternate “philosophy”:

- Its view of history is the virtual opposite of that associated with Darwinism and Social Darwinism: rather than perceiving history as the story of *progressive* development, it perceives it as *regressive* (in terms of that which is important, at any rate)—as, indeed, a *pathological* development.
- It does not, however, perceive this downward spiral as an *inevitable* process. It recognizes that at times, in the course of human history, there has been some degree of reversion to significant aspects of an earlier situation. Granted that such periods of reversion have occurred accidentally rather than “according to plan.” But the mere fact that such periods *have* occurred gives one some basis for optimism.
- Just as Social Darwinism has a normative component, so does Restoratism (as the very name implies, of course). But whereas the former gave people a license to mistreat their fellow human beings (and “haves” used that license—one of the reasons they became “haves”!), Restoratism asserts that moving in the direction of a more “natural” way of life would have desirable effects. (Here is where I (ostensibly) part company with Veblen. Although he did not explicitly advocate a “return,” many of his statements (see above) suggest that he favored it. However, in his later *The Engineers and the Price System* (1921) Veblen flirted with the idea of an engineer-run society. One must admit that Veblen *was* an admirer of efficiency. But the fact that later in life he declared that *The Instinct of Workmanship* was the most important book he had ever written[10] suggests

that his deep-down commitment was to Restoratism rather than a continuation of a technologically-oriented society.)

- If Social Darwinism gives one permission to “screw one’s buddies,” does Restoratism advocate the opposite? Not necessarily. Although it recognizes that “love one’s neighbor” is a better rule than taking advantage of him or her, it also recognizes that the Good Society would be one where the needs—physical and psychological—of all would be met, so that the need for loving behavior would be reduced drastically. This does not mean that the Good Society would be one of “loners”—for I would expect that a great deal of high-quality interaction would occur in such a society. However, the lack of neediness in such a society would obviate the need for the sort of behavior advocated by, e.g., Jesus. (Note, for example, that the “plan of salvation” attributed to Jesus in Matthew 25—feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc.—involves only behavior directed at the needy.)
- It should be unnecessary to state that a literal return to a gatherer-hunter way of life would be neither possible nor desirable: Earth simply could not support the current population of the Earth under a regime of gathering-hunting; even if possible, it would be impossible to convince people to return to such a regime. Thus, a “return” must involve important aspects of what has been lost, while retaining all that which is worth retaining in the Existing Order.
- In doing the latter some hard thinking is called for. For example, we must re-examine our fixation on acquisition (especially of material things) and growth—for two reasons. First, the oft-repeated claim (reinforced by advertising) that material consumption is the source of not only physical but psychological well-being needs to be discarded: although a certain amount of material things are needed for survival and comfort, Alan Thein Durning’s *How Much is Enough?* (1992), for example, indicates that their value for those purposes are limited—and that the important needs are satisfied by other than things (such as the quality of our interactions with others). Second, the activities associated with the production, transportation, and even consumption of things are polluting—given our dependence (beginning about 1750 CE) on fossil fuels. Pollution takes a variety of forms, but in the form of “global warming” threatens the existence of many species, even threatening to decimate our own before the century is out.
- In attempting to “return” what are examples of goals that we should seek? I would list five as primary: (a) seek to live in small groups, (b) that are relatively self-sufficient (at least in economic, if not cultural, terms), (c) live close to Nature as much as possible, (d) create institutions that promote interactional harmony (and not just within-group such harmony), and (e) strive for a low-energy existence (even if not using fossil fuels).
- The implementation of Restorationism will not be easy! We must work to do so, however, not only for the sake of increased well-being for the people of the world, but for the sake (quite possibly) of our survival. (Even if our species manages to survive this century, some scientists believe that 60% of all other species will not.[11]) Historically, we have been fond of “technological fixes,” but although it may solve our “global

warming” problem it is not the answer to our (i.e., we humans) well-being problem. Restoratism, on the other hand, can address **both** problems simultaneously—and contribute even more to the removal of the former problem because it would not only be in favor of eliminating the use of fossil fuels in favor of other energy sources, but would favor reduced energy usage *per se*. What is needed primarily for Restoratism to succeed is a huge dose of creativity aimed at developing *specific* ideas—regarding not only the “shape” of the future Good Society, but how to get there. May it be so!

Endnotes

1. This assessment indicates the choice that we have made, but the “screw your buddy” part is not quite accurate. First, the tendency is not so much to screw one’s buddies as to screw those perceived as inferiors. Second, the tendency is especially strong with the society’s “haves”—this tendency on their part being, in fact, the primary factor accounting for their being “haves” (contrary to our official mythology). It should be added, however, that the tendency owes more to societal position (and imitation of one’s “superiors”) than to genetics. I should perhaps mention that Parts II and III of the Linden book are written from what I later in this essay term a “discrepant” perspective. Given this fact, I regard the book as one of the most important books published during the twentieth century.
2. See, e.g., Barrie Wilson, *How Jesus Became Christian*, 2008.
3. The phrase was borrowed, with credit, from Herbert Spencer [1820 – 1903], at the insistence of the co-inventor of “natural selection,” Alfred Russel Wallace [1823 – 1913]. I say “inventor” rather than “discoverer” because the concept derived more from the earlier speculative writings of Thomas Hobbes [1588 – 1679] and “Rev.” Thomas Malthus [1766 – 1834] than from empirical observation.
4. The modern meanings given to the term likely owe more to Richard Hofstadter’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (1944) than to any other work. That work has, however, been heavily criticized by a number of scholars, including (listed alphabetically) Robert Bannister, Donald C. Bellomy, Edwin Black, Paul Crook, Geoffrey Hodgson, Howard Kaye, Thomas Leonard, and Michael Ruse.
5. Usually when that claim is made, the suggestion is that Jesus’s teachings are the centerpiece of the religion. However, the fact of the matter is that after Jesus’s death a number of Jesus movements developed, and the strand from which Christianity emerged may not even have been one of them! The particular group that gave rise to Christianity—and emerged to dominance around the beginning of the fourth century CE—placed an emphasis on *beliefs* about Jesus (i.e., orthodoxy) rather than the *ethics* taught by Jesus (an ethics that was derived from Hebrew Scripture, as one might expect)—this ethical system being the “heart” of Jesus’s “ministry” (a fact that should not be surprising given Judaism’s orientation to Law; for more on this see my [Worship](#)). That is, the religion of Jesus became a religion *about* Jesus—thereby prostituting that religion, virtually beyond recognition. See, e.g., Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?*, 1995.

6. See, e.g., Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, 1986.
7. One often encounters the ignorant statement, “Just read the newspapers and you will obtain plenty of proof that human nature is by no means positive.”
8. *Sociobiology and Behavior*, 1977, pp. 318 – 324.
9. Something that Veblen learned not only from Kropotkin, but from his reading in the anthropological literature of the day.
10. Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*, 1934, p. 324.
11. Tim Flannery, *Weather Makers*, 2005, p. 183.

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Societal System Change: Some Considerations

James B. Gray

The problems that individuals have are explained in three different ways:

- Individuals with problems have brought those problems on themselves—through, e.g., eating improperly, carelessness, being lazy, etc. (This “blame the victim” (1) sort of explanation has been popular in the United States for some time, reflecting the hold that individualistic thinking has had in our society—especially in the form of *laissez-faire* and Social Darwinian “philosophy”).
- Individuals with problems have them as a result of actions (or inaction) of others—such as exploitation by others, attacks by others, etc. (This is the fundamental Biblical view—see my [Worship](#) for an extended discussion.)
- The societal system itself is the fundamental cause of most of the problems that members of society have. (This concept underlies the “utopian” literature, including utopian novels such as Edward Bellamy’s [1850 – 1898] *Looking Backward*, 1888. One of the more important authors of literature in this genre was Charles Fourier [1772 – 1837].)(2)

The underlying assumption of this essay is that the third answer has the most merit, and that the problems that are evident in individuals in a society are ultimately attributable to the nature of the society itself. So that given this “fact,” if those problems are to be corrected, societal system change will be required—rather than, e.g., elimination of all those with problems. I should add the obvious fact that some sorts of societal system change can be expected to be more effective than others in “fixing” these problems.

This position on the matter of individual problems raises a series of questions:

- What general principle(s) should be used in the design of the Good Society—resulting in the society having what particular features?
- What might be the “look”—i.e., the specific features—of a society designed with that principle(s) in mind?
- What steps would be required, and in what order, for the achievement of that society? (A question that assumes that progress here will not be inevitable but, rather, requires the development and implementation of plans.)
- Who/what should take the lead in taking those steps? (For example, should this entity be government at the national level, other organizations, or individuals?)

In this essay I limit my attention to the first question, and in addressing it feature the “Discrepancy” concept. I argue that (a) the phenomenon itself has existed for millennia, (b) tacit

recognition, in some form, of the phenomenon has existed for nearly as long, (c) *explicit* recognition of it could not occur until evolutionary thinking became common, (d) the content of the concept received its incipient development at the hands of Thorstein Veblen [1857 – 1929], but that the actual *naming* of the concept occurred with sociobiologist David P. Barash.(3)

A number of individuals have made contributions to the concept's development since Veblen's time, but the concept remains—admittedly—rather undeveloped. What this reflects, however, is not that the concept is an unimportant one but, rather, that the implications associated with the concept are of a subversive nature—ones that pose a potential threat to the society's rulers. For the concept implies that societal problems have their roots in the societal system itself, so that they can only be solved via societal system change.

My “plan” here is, first, to present the Discrepancy concept in the form of a logical argument, with each point in that argument being given support with a quotation from one or more quotations from two of Veblen's many works. In an effort to keep the essay relatively short, I draw quotations from just two of Veblen's works, “[Christian Morals](#) and the Competitive System” (1910)) and *The [Instinct](#) of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914). The former will be referred to below as “CM,” the latter as “IW.” If a quotation does not appear under a given point, what this signifies is either that I have placed a relevant quotation(s) under some other point(s), or the point itself represents a “missing link” (!) in Veblen's reasoning that I am supplying for the sake of making the argument complete.

Second (in Section II). using the content of the Discrepancy concept as a basis, I specify some general features that the Good Society should have—this discussion suggesting, of course, that those features can only be obtained via societal system change. Questions two through four listed at the beginning receive no attention in this essay (although I have provided answers to them in another paper, so far unpublished).

The Discrepancy Concept

Although I attribute the Discrepancy concept to Veblen, I attribute the *seed* for this development to Kropotkin's discussion (in *Mutual Aid*, 1902) of the importance of cooperative behavior in Nature (including with humans)—such that such behavior is a virtual law of nature. The reasoning that I attribute to Veblen here is that *if early human behavior was characterized by cooperative behavior, (4) given that humans today are basically the same, biologically, as they were thousands of years ago, it follows that today's way of life is not a natural one—and must, therefore, be having negative consequences for its “inmates.” Given this, it should be replaced with a more natural one. In other words, given that these problems should be corrected, if possible, this can be done only via societal system change.*

1. Contemporary “savages” (the term used a century ago to refer to gatherer-hunter peoples) have been found to engage primarily in positive behaviors (e.g., working cooperatively with others) relative to others in the group, as well as neutral activities (e.g., conversing and/or joking with others in the group).

“While this [“the principle of brotherly love, or the impulse to mutual service”] seems to be a characteristic trait of Christian morals and may serve as a specific mark by which to

distinguish this morality from the greater non-Christian cults, it is apparently a trait which Christendom shares with many of the obscurer cultures, and which does not in any higher degree characterise Christendom than it does these other, lower cultures. In the lower, non-Christian cultures, particularly among the more peaceable communities of savages, something of the kind appears to prevail by mere force of hereditary propensity; at least it appears, in some degree, to belong to these lower civilisations without being traceable to special teaching or to a visible interposition of divine grace. And in an obscure and dubious fashion, perhaps sporadically, it recurs throughout the life of human society with such an air of ubiquity [this statement appears to have been influenced by Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*—JBG] as would argue that it is an elemental trait of the species, rather than a cultural product of Christendom. It may not be an overstatement to say that this principle is, in its elements, in some sort an atavistic trait, and that Christendom comes by it through a cultural reversion to the animus of the lower (peaceable) savage culture.” [CM]

“the lower cultures, where the hereditary traits of the species should presumably assert themselves” [CM]

“The Christian principles inculcate brotherly love, mutual succor: Love thy neighbor as thyself; *Mutuum date, nihil inde sperantes*. This principle seems, in its elements at least, to be a culturally atavistic trait, belonging to the ancient, not to say primordial, peaceable culture of lower savagery.” [CM]

“the golden rule of the peaceable savage has never lost the respect of occidental mankind, and its hold on men’s convictions is, perhaps, stronger now than at any earlier period of the modern time.” [CM] [Wishful thinking?!—JBG]

“Its [renunciation’s] companion principle, brotherly love or mutual service, appears, in its elements at least, to be a very deep rooted and ancient cultural trait, due to an extremely protracted experience of the race in the early stages of human culture, reinforced and defined by the social conditions prevalent in the early days of Christianity.” [CM]

“the impulsive bias of brotherly love” [CM]

2. We can infer from this fact that prior to the Agricultural Revolution—when only “savage” humans existed—similar behavior prevailed with the humans of the time.

3. Given that with the “savages” of the pre-Agricultural Revolution period we can assume that there had been co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life (with associated behavior patterns, stimuli to which exposed, types of substances ingested), we can conclude that the behaviors these individuals engaged in expressed the human nature that had developed.

4. With the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life (with associated institutions) began to develop, and with them new behavior patterns. (In addition there occurred changes in the stimuli to which humans were becoming exposed, and in that which humans began to ingest—e.g., for sustenance.)

5. However, human biology remained relatively unchanged over time. Because human biology was not changing, humans were now engaging in some behaviors contrary to their human nature (and also being exposed to “unnatural” stimuli, and ingesting “unnatural” substances).

“A surviving mutant type is necessarily suited more or less closely to the circumstances under which it emerged and first made good its survival, and it is presumably less suited to any other situation.” [IW]

“Changes in the institutional structure are continually taking place in response to the altered discipline of life under changing cultural conditions, but human nature remains specifically the same.” [IW]

“But there is no warrant for assuming that each or any of these successive changes in the scheme of institutions affords successively readier, surer or more facile ways and means for the instinctive proclivities to work out their ends, or that this sequence of change is more suitable to the untroubled functioning of these instincts than any phase that has gone before. Indeed, the presumption is the other way.” [IW]

“the fitness of any given type of human nature for life after the manner and under the conditions imposed by any later phase in the growth of culture is a matter of less and less secure presumption the farther the sequence of institutional change has departed from that form of savagery which marked the initial stage in the life-history of the given racial stock.” [IW]

“history records more frequent and more spectacular instances of the triumph of imbecile institutions over life and culture than of peoples who have by force of instinctive insight saved themselves alive out of a desperately precarious institutional situation” [IW]

“changes come rarely—in effect, not at all—in the endowment of instincts whereby mankind is enabled to employ these means [e.g., “technological ways and means”] and to live under the institutions which its habits of life have cumulatively created.” [IW]

6. We moderns still have the same basic human nature as our “savage” ancestors did, but our ways of life (with associated institutions, etc.) result in behavior patterns that are far more deviant than were those of, e.g., the early agriculturalists.

7. Because our modern way of life (with its particular institutions, etc.) requires us to engage in behaviors that are contrary to ones that would be in accord with human nature, the resulting “discrepancy” (to use a word introduced by sociobiologist David P. Barash) has various negative consequences for us: it precipitates pathological behaviors (involving harm to others and/or oneself), physical illnesses (including ones of a psychosomatic nature), mental problems, etc. (For an excellent “checklist” of relevance here, see S. Boyd Eaton *et al.*, *The Paleolithic Prescription*, 1988, pp. 279 – 83.)

“But such an animus as best comports with the logic of the machine process does not, it appears, for good or ill, best comport with the native strain of human nature in those peoples subject to its discipline. In all the various peoples of Christendom there is a

visible straining against the drift of the machine's teaching, rising at time and in given classes of the population to the pitch of revulsion.

"It is apparently among the moderately well-to-do, the half-idle classes, that such a revulsion chiefly has its way; leading now and again to fantastic, archaising cults and beliefs and to make-believe credence in occult insights and powers. At the same time, and with the like tincture of affectation and make-believe, there runs through much of the community a feeling of maladjustment and discomfort, that seeks a remedy in a 'return to Nature' in one way or another; some sort of return to 'the simple life,' which shall in some fashion afford an escape from the unending 'grind' of living from day to day by the machine method and shall so put behind us for a season the burdensome futilities by help of which alone life can be carried on under the routine of the machine process." [IW]

"This growing recourse to vacations should be passably conclusive evidence to the effect that neither the manner of life enforced by the machine system, nor the occupations of those who are in close contact with this technology and its due habits of thought, can be 'natural' to the common run of civilised mankind." [IW]

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"Not least convincing is the fact that a considerable proportion of those who are held unremittingly to the service of the machine process 'break down,' fall into premature decay. Physically and spiritually these modern peoples are better adapted to life under conditions radically different from those imposed by this modern technology." [IW]

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"Neither the manner of life imposed by the machine process, nor the manner of thought inculcated by habituation to its logic will fall in with the free movement of the human spirit, born, as it is, to fit the conditions of savage life. So there comes an irrepressible—in a sense, congenital—recrudescence of magic, occult science, telepathy, spiritualism, vitalism, pragmatism." [IW] [And much more!—JBG]

8. Still, because humans continue to have the same basic biology that they had when “savagery” prevailed, from time to time (and especially within certain classes of people) behavior in accord with human nature occurs on a fairly widespread scale.

[Note: Twice in “Christian Morals . . .” Veblen used the term “mutual aid,” suggesting that he was familiar with Prince Peter Kropotkin’s book with that title (published in 1902, but based on a series of articles published several years earlier in *The Nineteenth Century*, an important periodical of the time. Kropotkin had written the articles to respond to an earlier article in the same periodical by Thomas H. Huxley.) Veblen may also have been familiar with other of Kropotkin’s works, such as *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1924)—for, after all, Veblen was a well-read man—and died five years after the latter was published. Insofar as Veblen was familiar with Kropotkin’s works, he would have learned of “mutual aid” behavior in both the animal and human realms—some of it resulting from Kropotkin’s own research in Siberia.]

[At the time of the origin of Christianity:] “The pride of caste and all the principles of differential dignity and honor fell away, and left mankind naked and unashamed and free to follow the promptings of hereditary savage human nature [,] which make for fellowship and Christian charity. Barring repressive conventionalities, reversion to the spiritual state of savagery is always easy; for human nature is still substantially savage. The discipline of savage life, selective and adaptive, has been by far the most protracted and probably the most exacting of any phase of culture in all the life-history of the race; so that by heredity human nature still is, and must indefinitely continue to be, savage human nature. This savage spiritual heritage that ‘springs eternal’ when the pressure of conventionality is removed or relieved, seems highly conducive to the two main traits of Christian morality, though more so to the principle of brotherly love than to that of renunciation [or “humility,” “abnegation”].” [CM] [Note here that although Veblen used the word “selective” he did not refer to Darwin’s “natural selection”!—JBG]

[Although the brotherly love principle that operated with the early Christians has lost much of its force, “being currently represented by a thrifty charity, and, perhaps, by the negative principle of fair play, neither of which can fairly be rated as a competent expression of the Christian spirit.”] “Yet this principle is forever reasserting itself in economic matters, in the impulsive approval of whatever conduct is serviceable to the common good and in the disapproval of disserviceable conduct even within the limits of legality and natural right.” [CM]

[The historical development of a period during which “handicraft and petty trade” were the dominant features of the economy involved, one might argue] “a qualified or mitigated (sophisticated) return to the spirit of savagery, or at least as a spiritual reversion looking in that direction, though by no means abruptly reaching the savage plane.” [IW] [A brilliant point! Is it possible that the frontier experience in the United States had somewhat the same effect? Did, e.g., Frederick Jackson Turner hint at this?—JBG]

“That the eighteenth-century system of Natural Rights allows . . . a degree of approximation to the scheme of rights and obligations observed among many primitive peoples need flutter no one’s sense of cultural consistency. Return to Nature was more or

less of a password in the closing period of the era of handicraft and after, and in respect of this system of civil relations it appears that the popular attitude of that time was in effect something of a reversion to primitive habits of thought; though it was at best a partial return to a 'state of nature,' in the sense of a state of peace and industry rather than a return to the unsophisticated beginnings of society." [IW] [I believe that Veblen was alluding here to the Romantic Movement—JBG]

"It is not that the era of handicraft was an era of reversion to savagery, but only that the tone-giving factor in the community of that time reverted, by force of the state of the industrial arts, to habits of peace and industry, in which direct and detailed manual work takes a leading place." [IW]

9. There is therefore hope that such behavior can come to the fore again, on a widespread scale, if the circumstances are right.

"Except for a possible reversion to a cultural situation strongly characterised by ideals of emulation and status, the ancient racial bias embodied in the Christian principle of brotherhood should logically continue to gain ground at the expense of the pecuniary morals of competitive business." [CM]

10. What are those "circumstances"?

The right institutional situation (among other factors), would be my answer. Veblen was silent on this matter, but the fact that he perceived the "savage" way of life as "natural" and regarded that way of life as normative means that he would have been supportive of institutions that permitted, and even conduced, behaviors characteristic of "savagery"—and perhaps also insisted that we humans still need exposure to the sorts of stimuli to which our ancient ancestors were exposed, and still need to ingest the sorts of substances that they did. (Relative to this latter point, I find it of interest that *The Paleolithic Prescription* book referred to earlier emphasizes diet.)

Implications of The Argument

Although Veblen did not say as much, we can impute to him a belief that humans had, via the operation of various selection mechanisms, become "designed" to engage in certain behaviors, be exposed to certain stimuli, and to ingest certain stimuli. With the development of "civilized" life, not only were humans deprived of what was natural in these three matters; they were exposed to that which was *unnatural* in all three regards. It is not surprising, then, that the resulting Discrepancy had various negative consequences—most directly increased physical and mental well-being, their consequences, in turn, being the development of class/caste systems and pathological behaviors, etc. Indeed, Parts II and III (pp. 61 – 168) of Eugene Linden's brilliant *Affluence and Discontent* (5) can be interpreted as a historical discussion that tacitly relates historical developments to the Discrepancy. That is, it presents Western history as a story of *anything but* progress, in terms of that which is really important—human well-being.

It is worth pointing out, however, that an increasing Discrepancy provoked a backlash as well. Evidence for this has come down to us in the Bible. Some of the ancient Hebrews (who lived in the "Holy Land"—which the Israelis have made most *unholy*!) tacitly recognized the existence

of a Discrepancy, especially noticing as an effect the rise of a poverty problem (some of it caused by military conflict, leaving widows and orphans as victims), some of it caused by misfortune combined with the disappearance of the old communal way of living). The solution offered by some of these Hebrew intellectuals was to try to convince the society's "haves" to address the needs of the society's needy—doing so in extremely sophisticated ways (as I point out in [Worship](#)). Although some of these individuals made a few comments regarding their ideas concerning the Good Society (one that lacked places of worship, by the way!), their focus was not on trying to bring about societal system change. Rather, the solution they offered was to try to motivate "haves" to address the needs of the needy—and they did so brilliantly. Presumably they perceived such an approach as a realistic one—not only because "haves" had the means to help others, but also because "haves" were at least partially responsible for the plight of the needy. Unfortunately, their strategy did not work, except for brief periods, and only partially then.

From the fact that these early Hebrew intellectuals were unable to effectuate a "return," it does not follow that we cannot accomplish a significant movement in that direction today. To do so, however, we need commitment not only to the three goals identified above (relating to stimuli, etc.), but need to have more concrete goals. I will conclude this essay, then, by quoting a passage from a book that grapples with this question and offers some degree of wisdom: "I have mentioned many things which, if we had the sense, we should do [given our problems of alienation and loss of identity]: reduce the rate of social change; live in communities; improve our political system; live in the country; simplify bureaucracy; avoid 'busyness'; reflect. In short, we should have to return to a simpler and in some respects more primitive kind of society."(6)

In addition, it is worth mentioning that S. Boyd Eaton *et al.* in their Table II ("The Paleolithic Prescription: Research Consensus," pp. 279 – 283) list 39 goals for the Good Society under the headings Nutrition, Tobacco and Alcohol, Exercise, Baby and Child Care, and Women's Roles. (8). And that Paul Shepard provides an analogous list (of 71 items) in his Table 2 ("Aspects of a Pleistocene Paradigm," pp. 171 -172), under the headings Ontogenic, Social, and Other). (9)

These various goals provide a necessary basis for designing the Good Society—one rooted in the Discrepancy concept, that is. The difficult part, however, is *using* them to create a specific design, and then working out a strategy to implement that design. Doing so is, however, an urgent matter given the threat of global warming today—a threat that, e.g., NASA's James Hansen has warned must be addressed within ten years if we are to have a decent future (or future at all, if some scientists are to be believed). It is conceivable that the global warming problem can be "fixed" via some sort of technological "fix." Our social problems, however, have no technological solutions; if anything, in fact, technological development results in an *increase* in social problems. *Societal system change*, however, if done right can simultaneously address both our social problems and the problem of global warming.

Will we humans adequately address these problems, however? Like James Lovelock, (7) I have an expectation that our species will be thoroughly decimated by the end of this century—possibly to the point of extinction. One problem of the Discrepancy is that it has enabled the development of ideologies—which "possess" individuals and groups so thoroughly that they are

unable to perceive reality accurately. It may, therefore, turn out that we humans are nowhere as intelligent as we think!

Endnotes

1. See, e.g., William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.
2. Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. In effect, Fourier argued that human needs were not being met satisfactorily in the Existing Order, and proposed the creation of mini-societies that he called Phalanxes to correct this problem.
3. *Sociobiology and Behavior*, 1977, pp. 318 – 324.
4. Something that Veblen learned not only from Kropotkin, but from his reading in the anthropological literature of the day.
5. Eugene Linden, *Affluence and Discontent*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979.
6. Gordon Rattray Taylor, *Rethink: A Paraprimitive Solution*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972, p. 149.
7. Lovelock wrote recently that “before this century is over, billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that will survive will be in the arctic region where the climate remains tolerable.” James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*. New York: Basic Books, 2006, p. xiii.
8. S. Boyd Eaton, Marjorie Shostak, and Melvin Konner, *The Paleolithic Prescription*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988, pp. 279 – 83.
9. Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998, pp. 171 – 72.

January 26, 2009

Human Design Specifications

James B. Gray

The “Restorian”³⁸² philosophy (if it might be called such) consists of the following assumptions:

- A co-development occurred, millennia ago, with humans as biological entities and their “cynegetic”³⁸³ way of life (whose “economy” involved gathering and hunting/fishing).
- This co-development tended in the direction of increasing concordance between biological development and way of life.
- Because of that trend, the tendency was for an increasingly high level of well-being for more and more individuals (relatively and absolutely).
- Accompanying the development of humans as physical beings there was the development of human “design specifications.” A way of expressing this is that certain needs arose (i.e., came to have a genetic basis).
- With the advent of the Agricultural Revolution (millennia ago) changes began to occur in way of life, but not in human biology. Therefore, a *Discrepancy*³⁸⁴ began to arise between (a) the way of life for which humans had become “designed” (via the operation of various selection mechanisms—but *not* including Darwinian “natural selection”) and (b) the way of life actually lived.
- This Discrepancy has become wider since then, but not necessarily in a “progressive” manner.
- The development of this Discrepancy has had a variety of consequences, most of them of a negative nature.
- These (negative) effects can be minimized (if not eliminated) only via a change in way of life—i.e., via *societal system change*.

³⁸² The meaning of this word will become clear as the presentation proceeds.

³⁸³ A term coined by the late Paul Shepard in recognition that “gatherer-hunter” peoples are involved in many other activities besides economic ones. *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973, p. 5.

³⁸⁴ See, e.g., David P. Barash, *Sociobiology and Behavior*. New York: Elsevier, 1977, pp. 318 – 24.

- Our tasks as Restorians, then, are to (a) work out a design (or collection of such) for a better (more “natural”) society and (b) develop ideas concerning how to move our existing society in the direction of that Good Society.
- What’s needed as “raw material” for the design process is knowledge of our design specifications as humans.

My purpose here, then, is to identify those specifications—although I make no attempt to be exhaustive. My approach is historical in that I comment on key developments that occurred with humans—specifically ones that led to the development of design specifications. After I conclude my discussion of the emergence of human design specifications, and provide a list of them, I briefly refer to three others that appear in the scholarly literature.

Human Development

The first point to note in this discussion of the development of human design specifications is that early humans (and their ancestors, of course) had constant contact with the “surround” (i.e., Nature)—which was a *natural* surround. The significance of this fact is that they learned from this to perceive Reality as consisting of individual things (rather than as members of a class³⁸⁵), yet at the same time learned to perceive all things as related. Second, they came to associate “spirit” with individual things, and therefore developed an attitude of respect, even reverence, for the individual things comprising Nature. Third, they came to think of themselves as a part of Nature, rather than separated from it. Finally, they came to think of Earth itself as a unitary “being” that was specifically feminine—and therefore referred to as “Mother.” (And for Native Americans, at any rate, what we would call “God” was also thought of as being male, and often referred to as Grandfather.³⁸⁶)

Somehow—perhaps via the operation of selection mechanisms and/or “Lamarckian” inheritance of acquired characteristics³⁸⁷—this sort of “consciousness”³⁸⁸ came to have a genetic basis. Thereby, it became a design specification of humans.

Living in Nature requires, of course, that one obtain food and water for sustenance, and early humans were—from an “economic” standpoint—gatherers and hunters. The acquisition of food requires—in the case of meat—the killing of animals (including fish), and this activity caused

³⁸⁵ I believe that it was Ronald Reagan who once said “If you’ve seen one redwood, you’ve seen them all”—thereby expressing the common perspective of most of us moderns. A perspective very different from that of early humans.

³⁸⁶ Caution is in order here in that although the word “Grandfather” suggests that God was thought of as a person-like Being, this was not the case. Rather, God was thought of in verb (rather than noun) terms: God is “that which” has done certain things, thus is intrinsically amorphous/mysterious in nature. If God is a discrete Being with certain tangible characteristics, this is something to which we plead ignorance—because any other attitude would be presumptuous.

³⁸⁷ Biologists today are less likely to reject out of hand this form of transmission than they were a century ago.

³⁸⁸ I am borrowing this term from Charles Reich’s *The Greening of America*. New York: Random House, 1970. The key concepts in that book are Consciousness I, II, and III. One might perhaps argue that the consciousness of early humans most approximated Reich’s Consciousness III—but the resemblance was not that close.

(what Leon Festinger has called) cognitive dissonance in the minds of those engaged in this killing: because of their respect/reverence for the individual components of the natural surround, they were reluctant to kill animals; however, because they had developed a taste for meat, they were motivated to do so anyway. The cognitive dissonance that arose in their minds was resolved by developing rituals before and after a period of hunting. Perhaps this feeling of uneasiness associated with killing also became “implanted” in the genes, but I will not assert that possibility here.

A division of labor developed early on, with adult males engaging in hunting-fishing activities and adult females in gathering activities. The former involved developing knowledge concerning the habits of animals, as well as the development of implements to aid in the activity. Gathering involved learning what was edible, where edible plants were (and when), and also the development of implements to aid in performing the activity successfully.

I have noted that humans learned to think in particularistic terms (and that this might have become encoded in the genes). It now needs to be added that the knowledge developed by early humans was also of a generalizing sort; for example, generalizations were made (based on careful observation) regarding animal behavior, because such knowledge was necessary for successful hunting. However, it is worthy of note that *qualitative* thinking was the dominant form of thinking with early humans. The thinking that we moderns engage in, in contrast, is heavily *quantitative* in nature. This enables us to think not only in terms of more or less, but superior and inferior. And *that* ability (regarding which we tend not to be conscious) affects our behavior: if one thinks of oneself as superior, one feels justified in exploiting, persecuting, and even killing others; if one thinks of oneself as being inferior, this can have implications not only for oneself (affecting physical and mental health—including psychosomatic illnesses, alcohol/drug abuse, excessive busyness, accomplishing suicide, etc.) but for others (e.g., becoming violent toward others). It is also worthy of note that if one thinks of others in terms of the categories “superior” and “inferior,” one will have difficulty following Jesus’s precept of loving the neighbor—whether one perceives that individual as either superior *or* inferior.

The “economic” activities engaged in by early humans had associated with them certain stimuli and certain behaviors; over time these came to have a genetic basis—i.e., design specifications. Also, as certain substances came to be habitually ingested for sustenance, they also became design specifications (i.e., came to have a genetic basis).

A significant fact about early humans is that they lived in small groups—which implies that their economic activities involved cooperative activity. Such behavior also came to be a design specification—in this case perhaps via the operation of selection mechanisms: those unwilling to behave in this way were “unfit” for the group, and may have become banished from the group, so that only those with a natural proclivity for cooperation came to “people” these early groups.

Likely much more could be written about the development of human design specifications, but I believe that I have identified the key ones here: (a) a certain way of thinking, (b) a need for certain stimuli, (c) a need to ingest certain substances, (d) a need to engage in certain behaviors, and (e) a proclivity for engaging in cooperative behavior.³⁸⁹ Note that this view of humans—

³⁸⁹ For an excellent discussion of the relevance of design specification violation on health see Noel T. Boaz,

and human nature—rejects the notion that humans are “naturally” selfish and aggressive. Belief that they are is based much less on factual knowledge than a desire to justify one’s selfishness and/or aggressiveness. I might add that those who justify their selfish/aggressive behavior on the basis of Charles Darwin’s “scientific” law of “survival of the fittest” are referring to a theory—that of “Natural Selection”—which has little relevance in explaining the real-world behavior of animals, and has absolutely no relevance for explaining the behavior of humans (including early humans). This despite the fact that a tremendous amount of wrong-headed literature has accumulated over the years that claims the contrary.

A point that should be emphasized in a discussion of human design specifications is that with the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life began to develop (perhaps primarily because of a change in diet, rather than, e.g., accidental developments in technology), and this change forced the brain to begin to think in a new way. Prior to this Revolution the dominant type of thinking was *idiographic* (i.e., particularistic, but also involving the development of useful classifications and generalizations); with the Agricultural Revolution, however, the changing way of life forced the brain to begin thinking more in *nomothetic*³⁹⁰ terms (i.e., generalizing, abstract, quantitative). Thereby, a human design specification was violated, and this violation may have been the most serious of all. For it enabled the development of technology/science—which, although usually thought of as an advance, can also be viewed in the opposite manner;^{391,392} and it also enabled the development of ideologies—political, economic, religious, etc.—which most certainly cannot be regarded as a positive development (witness the problems, over the past 60+ years, that the Palestinians have had with the Israelis—problems with their basis in Israeli “religious” ideology).

I suspect that when someone says they feel “alienated,” what they are *really* saying is that they sense that the society is forcing them to use their brain in an unnatural way; I would add that I regard this particular violation of our design specifications as being of especial importance. This is not to say that the other four design specifications that I have identified here are of little importance—for I believe that all five are. If, however, I had to choose the most important of the five, I would choose the fact that we are designed for a certain “consciousness”—and suffer mightily in not having it.

Can we restore a “consciousness” that is natural to us? The New Word Fellowship that I discuss in my [Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#) may be a partial answer.

Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002.

³⁹⁰ These terms are attributable to Wilhelm Winderband. See Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944, p. 186.

³⁹¹ See especially Parts II and III (pp. 61 – 168 of Eugene Linden’s brilliant *Affluence and Discontent*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979.

³⁹² It should be clear that we would not be faced today with the threat of global ecocatastrophe were it not for the development of technology and science.

Three Other Lists

In my discussion of design specifications I have not only developed a list but attempted to provide an explanation of why these particular specifications arose—although I will admit that my attempts at explanation were not always entirely successful. The lists that I present (or refer to) next appear in fairly recent books that present fairly lengthy lists, but make no attempt to provide explanations. Nevertheless, I think it of value to call the reader's attention to these other lists—so that s/he can compare them with mine.

First, a brief statement from an early book that deals with the subject of this essay, but uses a rather different approach: "I have mentioned many things which, if we had the sense, we should do [given our problems of alienation and loss of identity]: reduce the rate of social change; live in communities; improve our political system; live in the country; simplify bureaucracy; avoid 'busyness'; reflect. In short, we should have to return to a simpler and in some respects more primitive kind of society."³⁹³ Note that this list is more "practical" (or at least less abstract) than mine, but that it overlaps with my list.

If the reader is interested in pursuing this matter further, I would recommend checking S. Boyd Eaton *et al*'s Table II ("The Paleolithic Prescription: Research Consensus," pp. 279 – 283); in that table they list 39 goals for the Good Society under the headings Nutrition, Tobacco and Alcohol, Exercise, Baby and Child Care, and Women's Roles.³⁹⁴ And also there is Paul Shepard's analogous list (of 71 items) in his Table 2 ("Aspects of a Pleistocene Paradigm," pp. 171 -172), under the headings Ontogenic, Social, and Other).³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Gordon Rattray Taylor, *Rethink: A Paraprimitive Solution*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972, p. 149.

³⁹⁴ S. Boyd Eaton, Marjorie Shostak, and Melvin Konner, *The Paleolithic Prescription*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988, pp. 279 – 83.

³⁹⁵ Paul Shepard, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press/ Shearwater Books, 1998, pp. 171 - 72

February 22, 2009

Why Are We in An Economic Mess?

James B. Gray

We're stupid!

More precisely, because our leaders are stupid. By "leaders" I don't mean our *political* leaders; I mean our *real* leaders—wealthy business leaders who, through their lackeys (lobbyists, intellectual prostitutes who work in "think tanks" and other organizations) control not only what is *done* in our society, but how people *think*. In fact, it is the "thought control" that they exercise in our society which helps them rule.

A major part of their thought control is their development and espousal of a "philosophy" that might be termed "Social Darwinism." This is a philosophy that was not created by Charles Darwin—although there were strands of that philosophy in his thinking. It is, however, a philosophy that has its basis in a phrase first used by Darwin in the fifth edition of his *The Origin of Species* (1869), having been borrowed by Darwin from his contemporary, Herbert Spencer. The phrase in question: "survival of the fittest," of course—a phrase known by virtually everyone, most of whom know virtually nothing else about Darwin. Except, of course, for Darwin's (alleged) claim that humans descended from apes.

What does the phrase "survival of the fittest" suggest for how people think and what people do? It suggests that people are "naturally" selfish, and will use whatever means necessary to gain wealth, status, power, and/or celebrity. It assumes that people have different interests in what they want, but that whatever a person's interests, they will pursue them, doing so without regard for how their actions impact others. Thus, it *encourages* people so to behave.

Those who espouse this philosophy argue, of course, that it is rooted in "human nature." So that given this, one has no choice but to obey the dictates of one's human nature. However, this claim is built on a lie—just as our war against Iraq was based on lies concocted in the Pentagon (its Office of Special Plans). Research done in a variety of disciplines over the past few decades has demonstrated decisively that "human nature," rather, is positive, and that the negative behavior that we can observe in our society daily (the grist of our media!) owes much more to the nature of our *society* than it does to our genes: *societal* structure, rather than *genetic* structure, is the chief culprit.

It is not my intention to pursue this matter of "why" further here; rather, it is to point out that if our society were to be governed by the principles enunciated in Matthew 25 (giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, etc.), rather than Social Darwinism, our society would be a very different one—and among other things, we would not now be faced with an economic crisis.

The argument that we *must* be guided by the Social Darwinism philosophy is increasingly sounding hollow—as research findings accumulate that disprove that claim. Which does not mean, however, that shifting over to a philosophy that derives (directly, at least) from the gospel of Matthew will be easily accomplished: there is a great deal of inertia to overcome, and it

would appear that only if some of our leaders provide the necessary leadership, this “conversion” will not occur. I hope that I am wrong regarding this matter, but must admit that I am not optimistic.

How can the “conversion” be accomplished? The first point that I would make is that new *institutions* need to be developed within our society. Second, I would recommend as a starting point the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) advocated in my [Worship](#). The reason I believe this to be such a good place to start, is that NeWF discussions could not only lead to ideas regarding other institutions to create, but have so many other positive consequences—including the well-being of participants (to say nothing of the positive actions of those participants relative to others with whom they come in contact).

It is rather ironic that I offer this suggestion here, because the ideas I am presenting here are ones that occurred to me while attending church this morning (the pastor’s topic for the day was our economic crisis)—given that the NeWF has no pastor, and uses no Scripture! But so be it!

After church my wife wanted to stop at a store in a small shopping center, so of course we did. (I should have added earlier that women also rule!) I waited in the car, listening to Carole Farley singing some of Edvard Grieg’s songs, and I began thinking about what gives us deep contentment. I concluded that three things do especially. One is having good relationships with others, not just family members, but neighbors, co-workers, etc. Second, the fact that some of the songs I was listening to brought tears to my eyes made me realize that I was listening to some great music—because it was beautiful. As a consequence, I realized that we need beauty in our lives—in music, in literature, in buildings, in other people (in terms of the kind of people they are), etc.—and in Nature

Our ancient ancestors were immersed in Nature, and evolved to have a need for receiving the stimuli that come to us from Nature. Unfortunately, the way civilization has developed, we have increasingly been forced to live in artificial environments, and we suffer from it. When I think of the most pleasurable moments that I have had in my life, they include such things as walking in a woods, walking along a beach, just looking over a vista while also hearing birds sing, etc.

I can’t believe that God intended for us to be living lives that do not enable our needs as humans to be met. We need to interact with others in a manner that we find enjoyable; we need to experience beauty continuously. We need to have close contact with Nature. Were we to develop a way of life that enables these to occur, even fosters them, not only would we as individuals have pleasant lives; our society’s problems—economic and other—would melt away.

Why can’t our leaders have the wisdom to recognize that they too could enjoy a much better life with a different society, and begin building it—perhaps by beginning with efforts to promote NeWFs? Who knows where this might lead?

August 20, 2009

An Alternative to Reparations

James B. Gray

[This essay was stimulated by Naomi Klein's "Minority Death Match: Jews, Blacks, and the "Post-Racial Presidency" and Mark Slouka's "Dehumanized: When Math and Science Rule the School" in the September, 2009, issue of *Harper's Magazine*.]

The claim that blacks and Native Americans are entitled to reparations is not without merit. However, my ancestors were peasants living in Europe, and were neither slave holders nor responsible for any atrocities committed against Native Americans in what became the United States—and many other whites living today can make the same statement. In fact, even those living today whose ancestors *were* involved with the trafficking and/or enslavement of blacks and/or mistreatment of Native Americans bear no responsibility for the behavior of their ancestors. Therefore, none of us whites living today has any obligations to our contemporaries who are black or Native American: from the fact that I am white and my ancestors living in, say, 1500 were as well (I would guess), it does not follow that any sins committed by them must be atoned for by their descendants, including me.

But from the fact that I am not responsible—from a *causal* perspective—for heinous behaviors directed at the ancestors of my contemporaries who are black or Native American (or, e.g., Latino) it does not follow that I have no *moral* responsibilities toward them. After all, those of us raised in a version of Christianity within which Matthew 25 plays a central role believe that (1) people should be perceived as individual humans, not members of some group; and (2) those individuals who are in need—regardless of where they live—must be given our attention. In the Good Samaritan parable, for example, the only point of relevance is that a person is in need of help, and the moral imperative is that help be forthcoming from anyone aware of the need and capable of rendering it.

Does this bring one with such an orientation in conflict with those whose orientation, rather, is toward reparations? Actually, it does—because, first, our orientation is to *individuals* rather than *groups*. And a more subtle difference that separates us from the "Reparationists" is that our value system is somewhat different. The prevailing worldview in this society is narrow in its scope, with a focus on measuring things in quantitative terms, and valuing the possession of material things/"success"/selfishness. The Reparationists in our midst decry the selfishness of "whites" (not just the *rich*, mind you), but otherwise seem to "buy into" the value system of this society. Their "project," it seems, is to become like "whites."

As one who was raised in a working-class family, in small-town America, I never acquired the prevailing worldview—enough of it, at any rate, to become "successful" and rich. And although I suffer from this fact (because it is hard to go against the grain), I have no desire to be anyone other than who I am. For the values that I was raised in are ones that I embrace. I am discouraged by the fact that I lack the means to *act* on those values to the degree that I would like. But I use writing as a means at least to express those values and make suggestions.

In this essay I specifically address Reparationists, and let me begin by stating that “I feel your pain.” That does not mean, however, that I support your efforts—insofar as those efforts are directed to “joining” the Existing Order. For the Existing Order not only lacks an orientation to the well-being (in its various dimensions) of all of its members; it is on a trajectory such that the end result may very well be a thorough decimation of the human population (among other species) by the end of this century (as James Lovelock—of Gaia hypothesis fame—predicts). It’s entirely possible, in fact, that of the 60% of species predicted, by some scientists, to be extinct by the end of this century, our species will be included.

Given the seriousness of our current situation (because of the “global warming” that is occurring), it is incumbent upon us humans to attempt to prevent disaster from occurring. However, the beginning of wisdom here is in recognizing the irony that the worldview that is propelling us toward catastrophe is the same worldview that results in most of us not even *recognizing* that we are so headed! Given this, it would appear that if humans are to have any chance of “salvation,” it is the “marginals” in our midst who must lead the way, rather than those “in tune” with Society’s ways. Not all “marginals” are black (or Native American, or Latino, etc.), of course, just as not all blacks (etc.) are Marginals. So that race and ethnicity are not the pertinent factors here; rather, worldview, values, and current situation are—with the necessary attributes being especially associated with Marginals.

What I suggest to Marginals (including those who are Reparationists) is that they first recognize that there is a more worthy goal than that of becoming “full members” of the Existing Order—an Order that might be compared to a stagecoach heading relentlessly toward an abyss. Rather, they should recognize that they can better themselves—while simultaneously contributing to the possible salvation of humankind—by working for a New Society. A society within which priority is given to human needs, along with a light “ecological footprint.”

Given the prevailing worldview, it would be foolish—even insane—for Marginals to try to implement a New Society via normal political channels. What, rather, Marginals must recognize is that if they would conceive the New Society as a confederation of small, cooperative eco-communities, the process of creating that society would consist “simply” of creating a few such communities, and working for their proliferation. This suggestion raises, of course, a number of questions that need to be addressed, but I eschew raising/addressing them here for two reasons: (1) I have already done such in other essays, and (2) I believe that by not being too specific here I will encourage a creative addressing of the matter by readers. I would add only that beginning this process with a certain vision of the Good Society would be of value primarily as a *motivating* factor—with every expectation that the *actual* society created would be somewhat different from the initial vision. What’s important is to move our society (and others) in the direction specified above, and to use a conception of an Ideal Society simply as a motivational tool for moving in that direction.

There is, of course, no guarantee that humankind *can* be saved. In fact, I am highly pessimistic on this matter. But what harm would be done in trying to create a New Order? None, so far as I can tell. Many in our society are engaged in worthy causes, but ones that have little relevance for changing the direction of our society’s development. Would that some of the Marginals in our midst (and their allies) would recognize that what’s especially needed today is reversing the current trajectory of societal development. Given that that trajectory has its origins in the

Agricultural Revolution of millennia ago (a conclusion implicit in Eugene Linden's *Affluence and Discontent*), the prospects for bringing about a reversal are rather bleak. Still, efforts must be made so to do—and the Marginals in our society are best equipped (except in financial resources) to form the vanguard in such a movement.

August 26, 2009

A Christian Nation?

James B. Gray

While reading Mary Dejevsky's recent "A [Mean Streak](#) in the US Mainstream"—an article whose subtitle is "The US tolerates more inequality, depravation and suffering than is acceptable here [in the UK]"—an irony occurred to me: Although church attendance is far higher in the United States than in any of the European countries, Christian values seem to be more pervasive in the various European countries than here. By "Christian values" I mean, of course, the Biblical values discussed in my [Worship](#)"—and briefly summarized in Matthew 25 (feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, etc.).

Having come to recognize this irony, I then asked myself why attitudes and behaviors in the United States are so Biblically deviant, given that this is a "Christian" society. The brief answer that I would provide is that "one thing leads to another"—an explanation that has at least two components. First, it suggests that if one is to understand the current value system operative in this society, one must use an historical approach. Second, one must recognize that a given causal factor that one identifies may have a variety of effects, that some of those effects themselves have causal implications—so that the result is a vast, and highly complicated, causal web.

This latter fact not only means that untangling this maze of threads is a daunting task—a task that will not, however, occupy the attention of many scholars for the simple reason that the System cannot tolerate much research that exposes its workings, and thereby poses a threat to it. It means, second, that those of us who would like to see our society "morph" into the Good Society are faced with an extremely difficult task: bringing about value system change will be exceedingly difficult given the complex of interacting factors that have brought about their dominance.

Still, it may be useful to offer some preliminary thoughts regarding how our current (anti-Matthean) value system came about. And a good starting point is to recognize that the principal early settlers of what became the United States were British people, many of them with strong religious ties, and especially to Protestantism. However, the version of Protestantism that most identified with had a strong Calvinistic component. This meant that although their religion had a behavioral orientation, it tended to be individualistic, and emphasized being *productive* (in the economy) rather than *good* (to others in one's society). As Caroline Robbins, e.g., has pointed out, an admirable "commonwealthan" tradition had developed in Britain. But although this had a societal (rather than individualistic) orientation, it affected primarily the educated, and did not get filtered down to common folk.

The first point, then, is that the earliest settlers on this shores (from the east, that is) embraced a version of Christianity that de-emphasized rendering help to others in favor of self-reliance and working hard (and efficiently).

Uniformity did not, though, exist throughout the colonies—in value system, means of livelihood, etc. In fact, Daniel J. [Elazar](#) has written about the three "political cultures" that developed in the

colonies, each with a geographical expression that changed over time as westward expansion occurred. Elazar's categories—moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic—likely represent over-simplifications of reality, but are nonetheless of value in illustrating the point that homogeneity in value systems did not exist in the early years of settlement. (It would seem, however, that the “individualistic” value system has grown at the expense of the other two—and is now the dominant one.)

The westward expansion itself had a significant impact on values, and perhaps in a more negative manner than Frederick Jackson Turner suggested. Moving westward involved becoming more rootless than one had likely been before, severed one from institutions with which one had been associated, and thereby promoted increased individualism and self-reliance. “Neighborly” activity was certainly associated with this movement, but this more a matter of necessity than one of commitment.

The development of habits of self-reliance combined with psychological feelings of insecurity and rootlessness can be thought of as providing a stimulus to technological development—which, of course, not only had implications for economic development but the increasing role of economic matters in people's thinking.

The employment of new technologies tended to be non-random geographically, meaning that economic opportunities began to be developed at some locations and not others. Where such opportunities were developing people began migrating—both from rural areas of this country and from foreign countries (European ones initially). This, in turn, meant the development of a hierarchy of settlements in this country, and the anonymous living associated with urban living. Because many of one's neighbors had an ethnic background different from one's own, one had a difficult time developing a sense of community—further promoting individualism and feelings of insecurity, loneliness.

Such feelings were intensified by the tendency of employers to adopt an exploitative attitude toward their employees. Positively, however, this tendency fostered the development of organizations to counter the actions of such employers. Organizations that helped provide some sense of community with fellow members.

Regardless of what stimulated technological development initially, once such development begins it tends to take on a life of its own. And given that such development has its primary relevance for the economic realm, economic matters come more and more to dominate thinking. And, of course, technological development has implications for what is produced, where, what skills are necessary for production, etc. So that technological developments inevitably impact people's lives, including their thinking.

Given the latter, it is not surprising that a variety of Economics develops that fosters individualistic thinking: the societal situation fosters such a development, and the development of such a type of Economics legitimizes and intensifies such thinking. At times a brilliant individual such as Thorstein Veblen comes along to espouse contrarian views. But such individuals have little lasting impact—because the System cannot tolerate such individuals.

Dejevsky's article focuses on the "unbelievable" (to a European) fact that the United States lacks a universal health system (something that is "so basic to a civilized society"), and implies that our value system simply won't allow such a system to develop in this country. Unless circumstances force such change upon us. I concur with Dejevsky that despite the "obvious" fact that establishing such a system would be a "good thing," it is not likely to come our way for some time.

However, I perceive our value system as an obstacle in what I believe to be a more significant sense. For some time I have believed that although our society has long put its faith in "technological fixes" to problems, the BIG PROBLEM currently facing us (i.e., "global warming") is not likely to have a technological answer. And that even if it does, there is a path that is better because of its ability simultaneously to address most of our society's (humankind's, in fact) problems.

The solution to which I am referring is that of societal system change. And what I advocate is initiating such a process with a vision of the Good Society—which I conceive as a federation of cooperative eco-communities. Not that such a society can be realized, but "without a vision the people perish." That is, having a vision is important for motivating people to follow a path that leads in the right direction.

As the above brief discussion suggests strongly, our current value system is the result of a long, complex process, and it will not easily be undone. However, our hope lies in an institutional direction: creating cooperative eco-communities, and giving them institutions that conduce a Matthean value system (and sustainability, of course).

Freedom

Alton C. Thompson

The *concept* of “freedom” likely arose in conjunction with a *desire* for it. Which implies that—from an historical standpoint—a stage of world history had been reached wherein constraints on action were being imposed on a significant portion of the population. Given that class and caste systems arose in conjunction with “civilized” existence (with its dependence on irrigation agriculture and settlement pattern dominated by the emerging city), we can conclude that the concept of freedom arose as a byproduct of the rise of civilization.

An implication of the above discussion is that although Isaiah Berlin (and, likely, others before him) distinguished between freedom *from* and freedom *to*, the former is likely the original meaning given to the word. And the constraints involved were of a “private” matter in the sense that where slavery existed, the slave-holders placed constraints on the behavior of their slaves (which constraints were resented—and resisted in various forms—by slaves); and where class-caste systems, rather, “merely” existed, those in subordinate societal positions resented/resisted the constraints necessarily associated with their subordinate societal position.

With Adam Smith (in the late 18th century) we have the development of ideas regarding the economic system that had their basis (unbeknownst to Smith) in the Physics of Isaac Newton. Individuals were perceived as responding to a force analogous to the law of gravity in that they were perceived as being naturally propelled to pursue their economic advantage—and to the exclusion of any other ends. (“Ends” here is more appropriate than “goals” given that the latter suggests conscious choice, and the Smithian view of human behavior was deterministic—in that if an individual invariably “chooses” to act rationally, in effect his/her behavior is determined!) Not only are individuals perceived in uni-dimensional terms from a motivational standpoint; although Smith had individuals engaged in different kinds of economic activities (because of differences in aptitudes and interests?)—because he recognized that there *was* such a thing as a “division of labor,” and developed an argument *for* such a “division”—he seemed to see individuals as mere “mass” (in physical terms).

That is, he seemed to believe that individuals all had the same *strength* of motivation (in seeking economic advantage) and same *ability* level in pursuing economic advantage. Because of these (apparent) convictions, Smith came to believe that the general welfare would be served if the economic “law of gravity” were to operative. What might interfere with this law’s operation? Government. At the time, national governments played an important role in the economy—as the term “political economy” suggests (e.g., Sir James Steuart’s important work on Political Economy—totally ignored by Smith); and many intellectuals—having an orientation to the common good—lent their intellectual support to a system of government in which the national government played a key role.

However, the late 1700s was a time when the Industrial Revolution was underway, especially in England, and industrialists were feeling constrained by government. (Which raises the question: Why were they not committed to the common good? Or were many, but were also convinced

that government officials were not sufficiently competent to make decisions consistent with that goal? Or . . . ?) Thus, whether Smith was conscious of this fact or not, his theorizing provided industrialists with the intellectual weapons they needed to argue for the elimination of “governmental interference.” “Capitalistic” thinking ever since has tended to be influenced by Newtonian Physics, and been much more of an ideology than a science—although it claims to be the latter, and has (unfortunately) convinced many.

In the twentieth century the economic collapse that began in 1929 (with the stock market crash) called into question the idea that government can only “interfere,” and FDR “saved” capitalism (from the Socialist movement—which was strong in Milwaukee for the first half of the 20th century) by creating a number of government programs, many of them oriented to addressing the unemployment problem. However, it appears that only the mobilization for war (World War II) actually got us out of the Depression, and prepared us for the prosperity years of the 1950s. Government programs aimed at the unemployment problem became no longer necessary, and government involvement in the economy began to subside—except that the regulatory policies that had been introduced continued to play a role.

With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 (president 1981 – 89), however, *laissez-faire* thinking began to make a comeback—likely because of the influence of Milton Friedman. (One might argue, however, that Friedman gained influence only because the mood of the country was shifting, and his ideas supported that mood. But if so, what caused the public mood to shift?) Of course, “freedom” is a word that has positive connotations, so that when used in the economic realm—free enterprise, free trade, free markets, etc.—the positive connotations associated with “freedom” get a free ride. But is freedom in the economic realm—and specifically the currently-existing such realm in the U. S.—actually a good? Certainly the assumptions upon which capitalistic theory is based are flawed: although it’s true that people vary in interests (as the theory assumes), it is also true that people vary in motivations and abilities—and those facts are not without relevance.

What I would like to emphasize here, however, is first that the concept itself is flawed—at least in the sense of being incomplete. Those who originated the concept sensed that external constraints existed, and were affecting their well-being negatively. What they failed to recognize, however, is that as their way of life was changing to a more “civilized” one, (1) the stimuli to which they were being exposed were changing, (2) the behaviors that they were engaging in (via force) were changing, (3) the substances that they were ingesting were changing, and (4) they were using their brains in a different manner. In short, they were being forced into a way of life that was increasingly not in accord with their “design specifications.”

Second, the introduction of a free enterprise economic system into a society will have different effect, depending on the society’s value system. And, in being introduced, it will have an impact on the value system itself—which, in turn In the case of the U. S. currently, the dominant values are (1) materialism (valuing material things, but in the sense of wanting ever-new material things—and not being attached to particular things), (2) acquisitiveness (a “drive” to acquire as much as possible in the way of material things), and (3) selfishness (the belief that happiness comes from, and only from, the consumption of material things, so that one must not only strive to acquire as much “stuff” as possible, but restrict the consumption of that “stuff” to oneself, one’s family, and one’s “friends” (or at least associates).

Given such a value system the introduction of a free enterprise system into the society has the ironic effect of resulting in the emergence of a society which is ever more inegalitarian. Why is this ironic? Because those near the bottom of the society, because they lack in income, will be very restricted in their behavior—i.e., will lack in freedom. And because of this, whatever progeny they produce will face a serious disadvantage so far as “rising” in the society, and will therefore tend to “inherit” the unfreedom of their parents.

If one’s values have a Biblical basis and/or a basis in the facts of human design specifications, one will have a societal perspective rather than an individualistic one. This means that one will want—and work for—a society within which the design specifications of all are met. One will recognize that people vary in their abilities and interests, while also having common design specifications, and will work for a *society* design that accommodates all of these facts.

The concept of freedom will not be ignored by the planners of this society, in that the planning and creation of the society will be a *guided* process—not a *directed* one. This can occur if the New Word Fellowship is used in the planning process, and can perhaps also occur if other planning procedures are used. It is essential that the Good Society not be created *for* people but, rather, be created *by* them—but with guidance. Guidance at least in the sense that a particular institution—the NeWF—is recommended for use.

Beginning with the Reagan years free enterprise thinking has gained a great deal of traction, and resulted in untold damage (as Naomi Klein details in her *Disaster Capitalism*). Including, of course, the “meltdown” that occurred here last year—and whose effects are likely to be felt for some time. Michael Moore’s forthcoming (to the theaters) movie “knocking” capitalism may, therefore, be well-received. However, a convincing alternative to *laissez-faire* theory needs to be created—and become widely accepted—before a climate will exist favoring societal system change of the right sort. Or is this actually necessary? Certainly the strategy that I have worked out—initially published in 1984—denies the importance of such a development. Still, I would certainly welcome the development of a convincing such theory.

As a final point I should add that that not only is it ironic that promulgation of free enterprise ideology helps lead to an inegalitarian society (within which some are more “equal” than others). In addition it is ironic that those who promote free enterprise ideas are themselves slaves to the *laissez-faire* ideology. They may appear to know what they are talking about, given the precision of their pronouncements (aided by quantification). However, their ideas are generally lacking in empirical support, and their thinking tends to be of a very narrow sort. Indeed, such people, although appearing to be normal (if rather smart) people, tend actually to be *humanoids*: not only is their thinking very restricted, it is overly focused (i.e., they are one-dimensional), and they lack empathy for others. Indeed, their emotional lives tend to be very impoverished.

We humans have allowed humanoids to gain control of our societies, and if this fact persists, these humanoids will lead us to oblivion. Would, first, that more would recognize this unpleasant fact about our (intellectual) leaders, and would begin doing something about it.

October 10, 2009

Jesus's Plan of Salvation: A Commentary

James B. Gray

“Salvation” is a word most commonly used in “religious” discussions; however, it is—and has been—given a great variety of meanings in such discussions. Because of this latter fact, *Jesus's* particular “plan of salvation” is most meaningfully discussed in the context of a general conceptual framework regarding the subject of “salvation.” Having presented such a framework, Jesus's concept of “salvation” can then be “located” within the framework—thereby making clear what his “plan” does, and does not, entail.

In developing a conceptual framework, the logical starting point is to recognize that “salvation,” as commonly used in our society, is multidimensional. Indeed, I would identify four *dimensions* of especial relevance (just as Native Americans attribute significance to the four *directions*):

(by) God – humans

(of an) individual – group

from (. . .) – for (. . .)

(for) present life – the afterlife

And would contend that any conceptual framework of value would give a role to each of these dimensions.

In light of this, I would first state that I see a “trinity” of basic meanings given to “salvation,” as follows:

- A. To be “saved” is to be rescued from a dangerous or miserable situation—the “object” of salvation here being either an individual or a group. The active force here might be:
 1. God, or
 2. Other people
- B. To be “saved” is to be released from feelings of guilt regarding “sins” which one believes that one has committed—accompanied by a feeling of freedom.
- C. To be saved is to believe that certain steps must be followed to be assured of a pleasant afterlife, and to be convinced that one has taken those steps. Salvation is in one's own hands (note the individual focus—and the absence of involvement by God), and results from:
 1. Developing a certain set of beliefs.

2. Developing “faith.”
3. Engaging in certain actions.
 - a. Rituals.
 - b. Productive work.
 - c. Refraining from “sinning.”
 - d. Doing for others.
 - 1) Direct action.
 - 2) Providing resources to individuals/organizations that will engage in direct action.
 - 3) Voting.

Although God is not explicitly involved in the “C” category, God is “behind the scenes” as the one who “authors”³⁹⁶ (or authorizes) certain actions.

The above classification contains a number of different categories, and let us next comment on each of them:

A.1. God Saving People

This is illustrated by the passage in Psalms 18 (2, 3) in which the LORD is referred to as a protector, a strong fortress, who provides safety to a person: God protects one like a shield, and saves one from one’s enemies. Petitionary prayer would be associated with this concept of salvation, and praises (sung perhaps) offered to God upon perceived receipt of help from God.

A.2. People Saving People

The tithing law given in Deuteronomy 14:22 – 29 requires that those who produce crops take, every third year, the tithe of their crops (i.e., one-tenth of the yield) to the towns, and be given to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows—thereby “saving” such people from starvation. (The other two years one is to party with one’s tithe!—but so that one acquires an everlasting reverence for the LORD.) Note that although the “saving” here is done by humans, God is involved as the source of the command to save others—in the here-and-now—from starvation.

B. Being Released From Guilt Feelings

In this case “salvation” is a subjective feeling on the part of an individual. One had been struggling through life carrying a burden of guilt feelings (for “sins” committed), and feels that that burden has been taken from one’s shoulders—by God, presumably. God may have done this

³⁹⁶ A concept associated with Delwin Brown’s theological stance.

of His own accord (“grace”), or because the individual involved pleaded with God for the removal of this burden.

Upon being liberated from former feelings of guilt, one is able to make decisions, and act upon them. Whether one then uses one’s newly-gained sense of freedom to pursue one’s own (perceived) interests or, rather, to act on the behalf of others (or both), is a matter not given attention in this concept of becoming saved. The orientation of this concept, however, is clearly to the here-and-now, with God only being involved as the active agent in the liberation.

C.1. Developing a Certain Set of Beliefs

The third (“C”) of our concepts of salvation is afterlife-oriented, with C.1. being the belief that one is spared from an unpleasant afterlife by adopting a certain set of beliefs—e.g., that God exists, that Jesus was and is the one and only son of God; that Jesus was born of a virgin; that the purpose of Jesus being sent to earth was (not so much to preach, but) to die on a cross to atone, once and for all, for our sins; that Jesus was resurrected from the dead; and that Jesus then ascended to Heaven—but at some later point in time will return to earth.

C.2. Developing Faith

The principal question suggested by this concept is: “Faith that (or in) *what*? And there is no clear answer to that question. “Faith” might mean an unwavering attachment to one’s “religious” beliefs (so that one differs from a C.1. person in that such a person *claims* to believe certain things, but only for “show,” whereas a C.2. person has an emotional attachment to a certain set of beliefs). Or it might mean that one is convinced that God-Jesus (being omnipresent) is always available to call upon for assistance. Or . . . ?

C.3. Engaging in Certain Actions

Here there are various possibilities, including the following:

C.3.a. Engaging in Rituals

Rituals of a “religious” nature, of course, such as attending church “religiously,” becoming baptized, participating in Holy Communion, etc.

C.3.b. Doing Productive Work

Here we have the Calvinistic idea that we are “put right with God” by becoming productive members of the economy, and being honest in our economic dealings with others. Seemingly, embedded in this idea is the (Adam) Smithian assertion that the common good is best served by each individual becoming a self-interested, productive member of the economy. Unfortunately, Smith’s ideas involve little more than the application of the principles of physics enunciated by Isaac Newton; so that, in lacking firm empirical support, they do not necessarily lead to service for the common good. 397

397 Indeed, Naomi Klein argues at length that in the hands of Milton Friedman, “free enterprise” ideas, when implemented, have resulted in untold misery throughout the world. And this man was presented with a Nobel

C.3.c. Refraining From “Sinning”

In this case the “actions” involved are actually *non*-actions. About a century ago, within United States Christianity, certain “vices” were identified as forbidden to Christians, upon pain of a rather unpleasant afterlife: drinking alcoholic products, using tobacco, doing drugs, cursing, dancing, gambling, playing cards (even if not involving gambling), and fornicating. Unfortunately (or fortunately!), these prohibitions are best viewed as ones that, rather than having firm Biblical support, represent good advice to people at the lower end of the economic scale—in that, if followed, they will help prevent one from “going over the edge,” and thereby penalizing one’s family (by reducing family income even further than it already is). Perhaps it is because this fact is recognized by many that Christianity—except for some of its denominations—puts much less emphasis on “sinning” than it once did. Which is not to say, though, that Christianity should abandon the notion of “sin.” For as Sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross argued over a century ago, the *nature* of “sin” changes over time.³⁹⁸ That is, as society develops, new kinds of actions come into being, some of which, when engaged in, are harmful to other people—i.e., are “sins.”

C.3.d. Doing for Others

The idea here is that one saves oneself from Hell—assures oneself of an afterlife in Heaven—by acting to contribute to the well-being of others. This is clearly not a Pauline idea, for in Ephesians 2:8, 9 Paul asserted that one is saved (from eternal damnation, one assumes) through faith (in . . .?), not by works (i.e., actions intended to contribute to the well-being of other people). The “doing for others” involved here can take several forms:

C.3.d.1) Direct Action

Such as that provided by the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25 – 37).

C.3.d.2) Providing Resources

Numerous organizations exist whose overriding purpose is to provide assistance to those with various types of needs. In this case one saves oneself from eternal damnation, not by oneself engaging actions to help those in need, but by providing money or other resources to those engaged in such activities. Having an excess of resources *enables* one to do this; lacking time—or a proper personality—makes such a course of action an *appropriate* one for certain people.

C.3.d.3) Voting

In Jesus’s day the citizens of a given country had little or no voice in their governing. Ostensibly, this is not true in our society—although widespread suffrage has not prevented an elite from emerging and “running the show.” Still, those seeking executive and legislative

prize!! See Klein’s *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

³⁹⁸ *Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973. Containing a letter, dated September 19, 1907, by Theodore Roosevelt; and an Introduction to the Torchbook Edition by Julius Weinberg. Originally published by Houghton, Mifflin and Company in 1907.

positions in government can only gain such entry by receiving a majority of votes. Thus, if one has little opportunity for direct action for others' welfare—perhaps because of one's lack of the necessary resources—yet wishes to do for others, one can examine the principles enunciated by candidates, along with their “track records” (if already in office), make a determination as to which candidates are most committed to “doing” for others, and vote for such individuals.

Having presented a conceptual framework regarding “salvation,” we can next “locate” Jesus's plan of salvation within that framework. First, though, we need to identify that plan. And in doing so, we need to recognize that in the canonical gospels a plan of salvation is attributed to Jesus in just one passage—Matthew 25. A passage that is clearly a plan of salvation for escaping *eternal damnation* given that in v. 46 those who turn their backs on Jesus's “commandments” are consigned to eternal punishment, whereas those who do their best to follow the plan are promised eternal life.

Jesus's plan of salvation consists of a series of commandments:

- Give food to those who are hungry.
- Give drink (water, preferably?) to those who are thirsty.
- Receive strangers.
- Clothe the naked.
- Take care of the sick.
- Visit those who are in prison (including those who deserve to be there?).

In short, Jesus's plan of salvation was: ***Work to save others from danger or miserable situations in the here-and-now, and you will save yourself from eternal damnation.*** Thus, it involves categories A.2. and C.3.d. And is in total *disagreement* with, e.g., Paul of Tarsus's claim (Romans 10:9 that one will be saved (from eternal damnation?) if (and *only* if?) one believes that God raised Jesus (from death by crucifixion). Given that Paul's discussions of salvation have little relationship with Jesus's plan of salvation, one has a right to question why Paul's letters have been included in the Christian Bible. As I note in [Worship](#), the ministry of Jesus, as depicted in the canonical gospels, was in clear conformance with the Hebrew tradition, whereas that of Paul was only tangentially related to that tradition—and for the most part was, rather, in *opposition* to that tradition.³⁹⁹

Having now “located” Jesus's plan of salvation, I would like now to offer a brief commentary on the plan:

- It is dualistic in nature in that it refers both to life in the here-and-now, and a (supposed) afterlife. (Regarding the latter, it can be noted that nowhere in the canonical gospels does

³⁹⁹ Ironically, the “Bible tracts” that are often handed out in public places also tend to present plans of salvation that have little bearing on Jesus's ministry! Rather, they tend to draw their plans primarily from Paul's letters.

Jesus provide evidence in support of an afterlife—pleasant or unpleasant. Rather, he simply asserts as “common sense” that there *is* an afterlife.)

- The plan is directed at those who are *not* hungry, *not* thirsty, etc.—i.e., those who not only have enough resources for their own needs (and those of family members), but enough to help others satisfy *their* needs. The way Jesus addressed this matter lacked the sophistication that one finds in the “Old Testament” (see my [Worship](#)), but this may merely reflect the fact that Jesus faced a very different situation than that faced by those who wrote the relevant passages in the “Old Testament.”
- Although the commands would seem to be directed not only at individuals, but individuals with means, one should keep in mind that these commands reflected the time-place within which Jesus carried on his life. The citizens of a given country had no role in that country’s government, except to pay taxes (and revolt occasionally!). Today, in contrast, we live in a society wherein virtually all have a legal right to vote. An implication of this is that not only can one with resources vote for candidates who will (they—the candidates—claim) support certain causes, but so can those who utterly lack in resources.

I may have given the impression that the religion of the Hebrews gave no role to “have nots”—simply left them “out in the cold.” There is some truth to this, but one should keep in mind that the cultic portions of their religion (along with the stories associated with it) at least served the role of adding some measure of cohesion to their society. Likewise, if we recognize today that all have the right to vote for candidates for office, so that virtually all of us are in a position to participate in the affairs of our society, and can choose to vote for candidates who promise to support common welfare measures, such recognition can be a force for societal cohesion. For both rich and poor can vote for such candidates. Unfortunately, the rich tend to support candidates who will act to make them even richer, and the poor too often are “bamboozled” into voting for candidates who promise to support efforts involving phony issues that have little or no relevance for human well-being.

- The “commands” constituting the plan should be thought of as *suggestive* rather than *definitive*. As E. A. Ross (cited earlier) noted a century ago, new sins emerge as society evolves; so that the kinds of actions that can contribute to increased well-being of others also change over time. In addition, we all differ in personalities, intelligence, education, situation, etc., meaning that each of us has an opportunity to interpret the plan for ourselves, and act upon that plan in a unique way. If one has worked out an interpretation of the plan that seems appropriate for oneself, one may tend to criticize those who develop plans that differ from ours; one may even accuse others of not *developing* any plan, out of an inability on our part to understand the nature of others’ plans. Thus, we should exercise extreme care in commenting upon the actions of others—as the Bible itself warns us (Matthew 7:1, 2).

What needs to be recognized regarding the “commands” of Matthew 25 is that the principle underlying them is that a certain end is regarded as desirable—well-being on the part of all. This does not mean that an egalitarian society is being tacitly “held up”

ass the ideal toward which one should work. It *does* mean, however, that a highly inegalitarian society is inconsistent with the commands; and that one should work to achieve a society within which the needs of all are met.⁴⁰⁰ Also, however, one should follow Karl Weick's advice, and evaluate the effects of one's actions so that one can refine future actions in the direction of increased effectiveness. *Positive* effectiveness, that is.

- When Jesus offered these commands, his intent was not that they would become the basis of an organization—such as a religious denomination. However, there is no reason why they *could not* form the “charter” for an organization—such that people would meet together to discuss how the commands might be “operationalized” by them (as individuals, and members of an organization), and then acted upon, whether by individuals acting as individuals or as group members. Indeed, the New Word Fellowship that I propose in my “Worship” (a link to which I provided twice earlier) can be thought of as having the Matthew 25 passage as its charter.
- The only organizations that have given a role to these commands are the churches. However, few churches have given these commands centrality. Rather, in most Christian churches these commands are subordinated to “proper belief” and participation in rituals. Indeed, in some churches—ones taking their cue more from Paul than from Jesus. obviously—“works” are positively denigrated!
- This suggests the question: How can it be that churches that have claimed the label “Christian”—alluding to the fact that Jesus has long been given the title “Christ,” meaning “Messiah”—manage to give so little attention to Jesus?! And in giving attention to Jesus, manage to focus on what Jesus supposedly *did for us* (died on a cross to atone for our sins) at the expense of what he commanded that *we do*?

This is not the place to discourse on this topic except to note, first, that the particular Jesus movement that became the ancestor of contemporary Christianity was strongly influenced by the pagan “Mysteries” of the time. Indeed, one could argue (as some scholars have—e.g., Charles Guignebert) that Christianity's very survival depended upon its becoming “paganized”—so that it could become attractive to the “gentiles” who mainly peopled the Roman Empire.

Second, if the poor are to have a “Christian” religion, its focus cannot be on what they can do for others in need (given their lack of resources) but, rather, must be on helping *them* cope. That is, it must be an inward-looking religion, rather than an outward-looking one, to attract adherents. Which is precisely what happened with some “Christian” denominations.

If those who had been raised in such a variety of Christianity become economically successful, it is “natural” for them to retain their self-centeredness. And that given that

400 “Needs” is, of course, a somewhat tricky concept, as those familiar with Abraham Maslow's writings will recognize. The point, however, is not to get bogged down in philosophical discussions regarding the matter, but to determine for oneself what actions to engage in to serve the well-being needs of others—and then act on one's conclusions.

with the need for coping now gone, they would be attracted to a variety of Christianity that ratified their “success” and placed no pressure on them to share their wealth with others. For is it not true that they gained their success by doing what God wants, and that if others lack wealth, this means that they are not in God’s favor—and can blame themselves for that fact?!

Finally, if people are raised in a certain variety of religion, they tend to become attached to it. And if they begin to question it, they tend to abandon religion entirely rather than change denominations. But if they *do* change denominations, usually this is for personal reasons rather than reasons related to Jesus’s plan of salvation.

- The final point that I would like to make is that as a reader of Eugene Linden’s brilliant *Affluence and Discontent*⁴⁰¹ I have become “almost persuaded” that world history is on a trajectory, guided by Gaia, such that humankind will be extinct by 2100 (something that scientist James Lovelock, of “Gaia hypothesis” fame, has come close to predicting). This “guidance” by Gaia means that developments will not be allowed that would divert humans from their destiny. So that it simply is not *possible* for any organization to arise—and become prominent—that would be centered on Jesus’s plan of salvation.

At times I have reached the conclusion that all of humankind’s problems can be laid at the feet of Christian (and Jewish) clergy: their *failure* to make Jesus’s plan of salvation central to their ministry is the ultimate cause of virtually all of the problems we face as humans. However, Linden’s book helps me realize that Gaia is simply using Christianity as a tool to bring about humankind’s demise—and nothing can be done to stop Gaia.

Or could I be wrong about this?

I hope so!! At least in the sense that a “NeWFian” movement will get underway soon, and expand rapidly.

401 New York: The Viking Press, 1979,

October 15, 2009

NeWFism's Intellectual Foundation

James B. Gray

My reading and cogitation over the years have led me to conclude that Christianity—in its various denominations (but least in Quakerism)—is a travesty;⁴⁰² it is not as it should be. And although this conclusion has led me to reject Christianity, implied in my use of the word “travesty” is the suggestion that I have come to see Christianity as part of a certain tradition, but a deviant virtually from the beginning. Given that I have come to perceive Christianity this way, my interest has not been in simply abandoning Christianity for agnosticism or atheism—or some other established religion. Rather, it has been in identifying the nature of the tradition from which it developed, determining how and why Christianity became a deviant part of that tradition,⁴⁰³ and seeking an alternative to Christianity that would more authentically continue the tradition in question. Regarding the latter, the result has been the development of NeWFism, that name derived from the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) that forms the centerpiece of NeWFism. (See my [Worship](#).)

As my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” does not provide (directly, at any rate) a rationale for NeWFism, and I believe it desirable to make my reasoning process regarding the reasons behind NeWFism as explicit as possible, I use this essay to accomplish that objective. This is not to say that there have not been “leaps of logic” involved in reaching my destination (i.e., developing NeWFism as a concept), but the following points represent what I perceive to be especially pertinent “facts” that have helped me arrive at the concept of NeWFism. I present the “facts” using a “bulleted” format:

- Several “Jesus movements arose following Jesus’s death. Scholars disagree as to the specific movements (and their number). For example, Burton L. Mack has stated that “we are able to identify at least seven different streams within the Jesus movement” during the first few decades.⁴⁰⁴ A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink have identified five.⁴⁰⁵ Etc.
- Christianity either developed from one of these early groups, or developed independently of any of them.

⁴⁰² Jeffrey J. Bütz has stated that “the development of the Christian church . . . [is] a travesty of the original Jewish beliefs and teachings of Jesus.” *The Brother of Jesus and the Lost Teachings of Christianity*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005, p. 172.

⁴⁰³ Such that its relationship with that tradition became a rather tenuous one.

⁴⁰⁴ *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995, p. 44.

⁴⁰⁵ See Bütz, *op. cit.*, pp. 131 – 32.

- Mack, e.g., has argued that in northern Syria, “probably in the city of Antioch,” the Jesus movement present in that area “morphed” into “a cult of god called Jesus Christ.”⁴⁰⁶ Thereby becoming the basis for Christianity.
- The group, however, that most authentically represented Jesus’s ministry—the Ebionites⁴⁰⁷—withered away, in part because they were declared to be “heretics” (!) by the emerging “orthodox” version of Christianity.
- The particular Jesus movement that became “successful” did so not because of its authenticity, but because of its appeal to “gentiles.” That is, “market” factors were of overriding importance.
- It had appeal to gentiles because of its resemblance to the Mystery religions that were popular at the time throughout the Mediterranean Basin. A useful list—containing 30 items—of similarities between the emerging Jesus movement that became Christianity and the Mysteries has been presented by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy.⁴⁰⁸
- Despite Morton Smith’s claim to the contrary,⁴⁰⁹ I do not believe that Jesus himself founded a mystery cult.
- I (at least) believe that Christianity had its beginnings independently of any of the initial Jesus groups, and emerged in Alexandria—either from the Therapeutae (a Jewish mystery sect) or the Naassenes.⁴¹⁰
- Regardless of how or where Christianity had its origins, the fact of the matter is that it emerged as a religion that had much more in common with the Mysteries⁴¹¹ than Judaism.

⁴⁰⁶ Mack, *op. cit.*, p. 75. See his Chapter 3, “Fragments From the Christ Cult,” pp. 75 – 96.

⁴⁰⁷ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2003, p. 253.

⁴⁰⁸ *The Jesus Mysteries*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999, pp. 60 – 61.

⁴⁰⁹ “Two Ascended to Heaven – Jesus and the Author of 4Q491,” in (pp. 290 – 301) James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 291.

⁴¹⁰ Mark H. Gaffney, *Gnostic Secrets of the Naassenes: The Initiatory Teachings of the Last Supper*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2004.

⁴¹¹ The classic work on the Mysteries is S. [amuel] Angus, *The Mystery-Religions: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1975. This is a republication of the second (1928) edition of the work, originally published (1925) as *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity*, by John Murray.

- Although a highly deviant Jesus movement emerged to dominance (and drove the other strands into oblivion), the “silver lining” of this cloud is that if a “paganized” Jesus movement had not gained the interests of gentiles (and thereby become dominant), Jesus likely would be a mere footnote in scholarly works today.⁴¹²
- We moderns can, on the one hand, appreciate this latter fact, but should also realize that Christianity’s role as a “carrier” does not provide a sufficient reason for its continuation.
- Rather, the modern should come to realize that the tradition that gave rise to Christianity is one worth continuing, but that Christianity has not continued that tradition *well*. Indeed, it is—and has been—a travesty.
- Therefore, if the tradition in question is to be continued in a more authentic manner, a new religion will need to be created.
- NeWFism is an example of a new religion that is solidly in that tradition. (There may be others as well; by no means do I wish to claim here that only NeWFism can continue the tradition evident in the Christian Bible.)

How, *specifically*, I arrived at NeWFism is something that I cannot describe here in detail—for I simply don’t know all of the steps taken. My “Worship” (cited earlier) gives some clues, but it is perhaps most accurate to say simply that some sort of intellectual leap allowed me to move from the above “facts” to NeWFism.

⁴¹² Charles Guignebert, *The Christ*. Translated (from the French) by Peter Ouzts and Phyllis Cooperman; edited and revised by Sonia Volochova. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1968, p. 110. Originally published (posthumously) in 1943.

October 25, 2009

A Rationale for My Proposals

James B. Gray

[In my “The Next American System: An Alternate View” I present the 5-“wave” strategy that I had originally presented in my 1984 article. In the following essay I present a discussion that ends by making a new society a rational choice, and then suggesting that my 5-“wave” strategy is one that can take us there.]

“Free enterprise [FE] economic system” purports to be a term with an empirical referent(s)—unlike, e.g., “unicorn.” Which, however, suggests the question: What attributes must an economic system have to warrant the label “FE”? Actually, there is a still more basic question here as well: How does one identify an “economic system”?

Let us first address this latter question, and state that an “economic system” consists of the economic activities located within a given country. This definition, however, fails to make clear what an “economic activity” is, so let us clarify *that* term by defining such an activity as a unit that offers something (excluding labor) for sale—i.e., a good, a service, or both. The unit can be an individual/family who/which sells things—made by them, or acquired from some other unit(s). Or it can be an organization. The selling can be on a person-to-person basis, via the mail, via the internet, etc. “Located within” means that the selling unit has an address within the given country.

The selling units that comprise a given country’s “economic system” can be expected to vary in (1) that which they sell—i.e., different goods/services; (2) the amount they sell (expressed, e.g., in gross revenue, with the dollar being the currency used); and (3) the geographical extent of their market. Regarding the latter, some units will sell only within a very small market area, others will have a regional market, others a national market, and still others an international one.

Given the above points, it should be obvious that one “economic system” can differ substantially from another—in size (i.e., total gross sales), the mix of products/services sold, etc. But to return to our initial question—What attributes must a given economic system have to qualify for the label “free enterprise”? It appears that the answer is a simple one: If the governmental units (GUs) in a country exercise little involvement in the activities of these units—i.e., they do not limit their initiation, control their operations, etc.—the country’s economic system can be said to be a “free enterprise” one. The governmental units may collect tax monies from the economic units (EUs) to help pay for the services—fire protection, policing, libraries, streets/roads, etc.—provided by the governmental units. But the GUs exercise little control over the EUs—either their origination or operation.

Given this concept of a FE economic system, it should be evident that it’s entirely conceivable that economic systems that qualify for the label “free enterprise” would vary greatly in their *other* attributes. So that it’s conceivable that FE systems would be a mixed bag indeed. Which means that the label “FE economic system” would be rather different from virtually any other label!—e.g., automobile, chair, shirt, etc. Meaning also that *direct observation* within a given

country would not be a very helpful means for determining whether or not that country's economic system was, or was not, a FE one—also an unusual trait for a label to have. Thereby making one wonder why such a label had been created in the first place!—indeed, making one *suspicious* of the label's very creation, given that it is not designed carefully to delimit real-world things, making their identification easy to make.

If “free enterprise economic system” was not created for identification purposes, why, then, was it created?!—one has a right to ask. In addressing this question, let us first note that highly positive connotations are associated with the term—in our society, at least. Indeed, one often encounters the claim that our economic system *is* a “free enterprise” one.⁴¹³ Or, if that claim is not made, the claim is that our economic system is not sufficiently so—and that an effort needs to be made to “get government off our backs.” After all, the Founding Fathers intended that our economy be a FE one, so that it is virtually traitorous to go against their wishes—or at least illegal.

The claim that it is *desirable* that an economic system⁴¹⁴ be a FE one raises the question: Why is such a system desirable (relative to one in which governments play a more important role)? The answer most frequently encountered to this question is that: “A free enterprise” system is ‘good’ because it gives everyone the opportunity of becoming an economic agent (i.e., a seller), and without restrictions being placed on one's activities as an economic agent. That although governments play a role in the society—a necessary one, in fact—they do not place controls over economic units; their only involvement with economic units is to tax them, and this is a rightful role so long as the tax policy is a fair one.”

What this answer ignores, however, is some very relevant empirical facts: If one has an *opportunity* to become an unfettered seller (as one does, by definition, in a FE system), it does not follow that one will have (1) an *interest* in becoming a seller; or if one has an interest, that (2) one will have an *ability* so to do—with “ability” referring to (a) intellectual ability (b) knowledge (gained, e.g., via schooling), and (c) access to financial resources that would enable to initiate a business.

What the FE “philosophy”—for that's what it is⁴¹⁵—ignores is that (1) individuals vary in their interests and abilities, and (2) economic systems—including FE ones—vary greatly in their attributes. Given these facts, if one's orientation is to the *general welfare*, one will point out that there is no reason whatsoever for believing that the general welfare is best served by a FE system. Indeed, given the amorphousness of “FE system”—the possibility that the systems that would qualify for the label would be a highly mixed bag—it should be obvious that there would be no clear general welfare situation associated with a given FE system. How could there be?!!

413 What those who make this claim usually mean is that the economic system *should* be a FE one—that any other system would be un-American.

414 The defenders of a FE system tend not to do so on the basis of its desirability. Rather, they tend to look to the past, and argue that the Founding Fathers advocated such a system, so that one is disloyal in going against their wishes. Such people have more of an orientation to *rights* than to *responsibilities*.

415 Actually, “ideology” is more appropriate than “philosophy.”

Indeed, one could argue that if a FE system exists in a given country, and that at T_1 all of the selling units are small, it is entirely conceivable that the general welfare would be served well—at least in the sense that the society would be relatively egalitarian, and that exploitation would be at a minimum (i.e., sellers exploiting those whom they hire to perform services for them). However, if we follow this country over time, we may very well find that at T_2 there is more disparity in the sizes of sellers, at T_3 even more disparity, etc.

John H. Bodley, in his *The Power of Scale* (2003), has argued (p. xv) that “throughout world history [certain] particular individuals . . . have promoted growth, or scale increases,” and that such increases have “amplified many human problems by socializing the costs of development and disproportionately concentrating the benefits. The implication is . . . that any of the most serious global problems such as war, environmental deterioration, poverty, and human rights abuses are really problems of scale and power.”

One might argue that even if we started at T_1 with a FE system that was relatively egalitarian, and assumed that it remained a FE system over time, the fact that people in it would vary in interests and abilities would mean that economic unit size variation would increase over time, the society would become progressively more inegalitarian, and *that* fact would cause other problems to arise—health (physical and mental) problems, violence, prostitution, etc.

Yet, the FE ideology has a firm hold on people in our society. And because of this, they tend to refrain from criticizing the existing system. They have been told that they live in a FE system, and that therefore they—everyone in the system—has an opportunity to “make it.” And because the ideology holds (contrary to the facts) that one’s degree of “success” *therefore* is a function of one’s ability and (especially) willingness to work hard, if one is successful, one tends to believe that one merits success, and if one is not successful, one tends to believe that the fault lies within oneself. And this latter fact acts to paralyze one from being a vociferous critic of the society. One knows that if one did so, one would be countered with the prevailing FE ideology—and likely would not know how to counter that ideology effectively.

A force that operates in our society continually to promote—subtly and, indeed, insidiously—the claim that equal opportunity and fairness govern our society is sports—both amateur and professional. With (team) sports there is fairness in that each team has the same number of players (so that no team has an unfair advantage for that reason), there are rules that govern the play of both teams (fairness again), and there are impartial officials who ensure that the established rules are followed by both teams. These facts about sports events have a carry over value in that they imply that what goes on in the sporting field is merely a mirror of what goes on in the economy—and the society in general.

This is not to say that sports play no positive role in our society—for it seems probable that they have helped change attitudes toward racial minorities. On the other hand, however, they have served a diversionary function—which is not just negative, for we need some diversion, and being spectators—and fans of a particular team—does help add cohesion to members of a given fan group. And usually does not lead to seeing other fans as enemies. But more importantly, sports (along with our judicial system) help perpetuate the national myth that fairness prevails in our society. They therefore not only make people reluctant to revolt, but reluctant to work for societal system change. Enough people in our society have enough security and comfort in their

lives that even though they may perceive problems in the society relative to their own welfare, they are reluctant to “upset the apple cart”:⁴¹⁶ acting on their concerns might, they believe, result in losing their position in society, so that it is not worth the risk of acting to change matters. Better to simply suppress any feelings and thoughts one might have of a negative nature, and try to enjoy life as much as possible—which may very well involve participation in sports, if only as a spectator. After all, as of a few minutes ago I was watching the Green Bay Packers defeat the Cleveland Browns, 31 – 3!!

An implication of the above discussion is that bringing about societal system change is a difficult matter. Although the average adult in our society is somewhat of a slave in being an employee, usually the burden thereby borne is not intolerable—and the income earned is enough for some degree of comfort. On the other hand, many in our society are unemployed, under-employed, or ill-employed; many have health problems (physical and mental); many live in fear of being attacked; and potential attackers likely have even more serious problems, their aggressive behavior being a symptom of them. A society is a “package deal,” and one must accept the bad with the good in accepting the society.

From my perspective as one who lives in modest comfort, my concern is not so much for myself but for those in this society who lack even that; and for all of us, from the standpoint of global warming and its potential for wiping out our species. I believe that it is essential that our society move in an eco-communitarian direction for well-being and survival reasons, and that NeWFs be instituted to contribute to the well-being of residents—along with a feeling of community that will ensure their continuation.

A final point—question, actually: What if the educational system in this emerging society were to center on Matthew 25? On, that is, a certain set of values? That human well-being—in all its dimensions—be the chief concern of people, including the educational system. This would not necessarily mean that science and math would be excluded from the curriculum, but would mean that they would be seen as means only. The point of learning would be to learn about the past in well-being terms, and learn what we can do now to increase the well-being of ourselves and others.

⁴¹⁶ If one offers criticisms, on the one hand one may feel that one is being un-American. And on the other hand one risks being called a “communist.”

October 27, 2009

Some Thoughts as Thanksgiving Draws Near

Alton C. Thompson

The approach of Thanksgiving reminds me that Jeremy D. Bangs, in his (undated) “Thanksgiving on the Net: Roast Bull with Cranberry Sauce, Part 2,”⁴¹⁷ noted that:

The Ludwig von Mises Institute in 1999 published Richard J. Maybury’s article “The Great Thanksgiving Hoax” (originally seen in *The Free Market*, November, 1985). Maybury (self-styled business and economic analyst) wants to correct our idealized view of the Pilgrims: “[T]he harvest of 1621 was not bountiful, nor were the colonists hardworking or tenacious. 1621 was a famine year and many of the colonists were lazy thieves.” [...] “they refused to work in the fields. They preferred instead to steal food.” [...] “The prevailing condition during those years was not the abundance the official story claims, it was famine and death. The first ‘Thanksgiving’ was not so much a celebration as it was the last meal of condemned men.” Then it all changed: “in 1623 Bradford abolished socialism. He gave each household a parcel of land and told them they could keep what they produced, or trade it away as they saw fit. In other words, he replaced socialism with a free market, and that was the end of famines.” [...] “Before these free markets were established, the colonists had nothing for which to be thankful.” [...] “Thus the real reason for Thanksgiving, deleted from the official story, is: Socialism does not work; the one and only source of abundance is free markets, and we thank God we live in a country where we can have them.”

“So there you have it—neither God’s providence nor helpful Indians, just materialistic private profit,” was Bangs’s terse comment on the Maybury article.⁴¹⁸

I quote this passage to prove the point that not only is “free enterprise” touted in our society today. The claim is also made that ours *has been* a “free enterprise” economy virtually from the beginning. For example, Richard J. Maybury has claimed that the Pilgrims at first practiced Socialism, but found early on that that economic system only brought them misery (“does not work”). They then turned to a “free market” economy, and (therefore) prospered—so that they then had something to be thankful for. And we moderns can be thankful that our forebears quickly abandoned their original Socialism in favor of a free enterprise system—“the one and only source of abundance”

Is a “free enterprise” economic system really that desirable, however? Let us address this question by first noting some of the salient features of such a system. The “free market” philosophy (if we may tarnish the “philosophy” by so calling it):

⁴¹⁷ Available on the internet at: <http://www.sail1620.org/history/articles.html?start=20> . Dr. Bangs is, e.g., a Fellow of the Pilgrim Society.

⁴¹⁸ It seems obvious to me that the purpose—if but unintended—of efforts such as Maybury’s is subtly to suggest that any economic system *other* than an alleged free enterprise one is “un-American.” Given that most members of our society do not want such an accusation being directed at them, “historical” presentations such as that of Maybury function to forestall criticism of our economic system, and discourage efforts to change it. Of course, if one criticizes the existing economic system as being *insufficiently* of a free market nature, one can expect to be applauded—and more.

- Tacitly assumes that an economy consists—*must* consist, in fact—of two fundamental components. On the one hand are *enterprises* (i.e., privately-owned firms)—units that produce-sell goods-services. On the other hand are *households*—units that purchase goods-services from enterprises, and also sell their labor to enterprises.
- Tacitly assumes that the activities associated with the “production” of enterprises (i.e., goods-services) are, at worst, odious, at best, neutral, so far as their contribution to one’s well-being is concerned.
- Assumes, rather (and does so explicitly), that one’s well-being results from, and *only* from, the consumption of goods-services.
- It follows that—given that, “obviously,” one wishes to maximize one’s well-being—one will try to maximize one’s consumption. One will therefore do what is necessary (but legal) to acquire as much as possible, and then consume it (with the help of one’s family members).

Given these features of a “free enterprise” economic system, can we say that such a system is based on a sound set of assumptions? Let us briefly comment on each of the above points:

- The assumption that an economy must consist of two distinct components—enterprises and households—is one that lacks in historical support. For, e.g., within the gatherer-hunter groups that prevailed throughout the world prior to the Agricultural Revolution (millennia ago) no such distinction occurred, nor does it with those few such groups still remaining. Indeed, if one accepts the argument that since that Revolution a “discrepancy” has been growing between the ways of life that people live and the way of life (i.e., gatherer-hunter) for which they became “designed” (via the operation of evolutionary forces—but *not* Darwinian natural selection), one would argue that an economy consisting of separate enterprise and household components is “unnatural”!
- The assumption that “work” is an unpleasant activity has realism for some people, but not for others. Indeed, people tend to choose a career partly, if not primarily, on the basis of their interests—so that they will be happy in performing the activities associated with that career. For the fact of the matter is that one can gain enjoyment from engaging in activities that utilize one’s various abilities—and further the continued development of abilities (rather than allowing one simply to stagnate). Pleasure—in the form of a feeling of self-respect—is gained in using one’s competencies, and in further developing them.
- The claim that well-being comes from, and only from, consumption is a ludicrous one: if one reflects on this claim—asking oneself what gives one a sense of well-being—one will quickly recognize that this claim is utterly lacking in merit. It is, of course, true that some consumption is necessary for survival and a certain level of comfort. But—as, e.g., Abraham Maslow has argued—once one’s basic physical needs are met, one searches *elsewhere* for sources of well-being.

- Does everyone try to maximize their consumption—and therefore engage in those (legal) activities that will result in their maximizing their acquisition? Does no one give anything to others, or otherwise do for others—even if they have far beyond what they need for their basic physical needs? Does no one gain pleasure from interacting with others?

Certainly some individuals seem driven to acquire (and “conspicuously display”). But this is true of only some individuals—and one suspects that what’s behind *their* drivenness is more a desire to be well thought of—even envied—by others rather than a desire to consume *per se*.

Indeed, I might add here that—strictly speaking—the free enterprise philosophy claims—at least tacitly—that sexual activity would not occur; for why would it, given that it is not a source of well-being, *per* this “philosophy”? Because it (tacitly) assumes this, it also (tacitly) assumes that pregnancies would never occur. Or if they do, the offspring would be given no care—for care-giving activities yield no well-being. Thus, the philosophy is an untenable one because even if it were to be practiced by members of a given group, at some point in time all of them would be dead!—so that there would be no one to engage in the activities associated with a free enterprise system. In addition, the assumption that only legal activities are permitted indicates that a free enterprise economic system, in its pure form, can only exist in a certain institutional setting: government must be present, and performing certain functions (including the maintenance of “order”).

Frank Dixon, in his “Gross National Happiness: Improving Unsustainable Western Economic Systems,” 419 has asserted that:

Western economic systems have produced great improvements in many areas including technology, medicine and the provision of essential and non-essential goods and services. However, as industrial economies continue to grow in a finite world, the overall impact is increasingly negative. Inefficient use of resources, high levels of pollution and numerous social disruptions resulting from industrialization have caused human society to be grossly unsustainable.

Dixon argues that if one adopts a systems perspective, one will recognize that one (and the economic system of which one is a part) is but a small part of a *world* system. And because of our connectedness one with another, the activities of a given person—or firm—do not occur in a vacuum but, rather, impact the larger system. Western societies, however, have been oriented to reductionistic thinking—such as that associated with the free enterprise philosophy⁴²⁰—and have thereby not only created inegalitarian societies (with the inegalitarianism being itself a cause of societal problems), but societies that impact negatively on the surround. Indeed, scientist James Lovelock (of Gaia Hypothesis fame) is so pessimistic regarding this latter fact that he has predicted the near extinction of our species before the century is out!

419 Available at: <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/ArticlesonGNH/ArticlesonGNHinPDF/Gnh&dev-4.pdf>

420 “Ideology” would be a more apt label.

Many criticisms can be—and have been—leveled at Western ways,⁴²¹ including the ideational systems (such as free enterprise ideology) that have “powered” Western societies. The point, however (to paraphrase Karl Marx), is not so much to understand and criticize, but to develop “escape” plans, and act on them. Which is why I have advocated the creation of cooperative eco-communities, created a strategy for moving our society in that direction, and also developed the concept of a New World Fellowship—in part as a vehicle for implementing the eco-communitarian idea.

I see the eco-community as—potentially, at least—a modern equivalent of gatherer-hunter group. Not so much in terms of sustenance activities, of course, as in terms of restoring more of a “natural” way of life. By that I mean a way of life that would provide those stimuli and behaviors (etc.) for which we became “designed” millennia ago, and address the other sorts of needs that I have identified elsewhere. The nature of ownership might vary from community to community, but generally speaking the ownership situation would have more in common with gatherer-hunter groups than that which prevails in our society (i.e., enslavement to the notion of the private ownership of property).

I have no interest in “converting” others to the need for creating eco-communities in our midst—for the strategy that I have developed has no need that this be accomplished. Following my strategy would mean abandoning free enterprise thinking, but there would be no need to critique such thinking, no need to convince the general public regarding the virtues of my plan, etc. What would be needed, rather, is “simply” to announce an intent to initiate an eco-community program, invite people to join if they wished, start the process, and work for the proliferation of eco-communities—so the point that the movement would become so “cancerous” that it would force the Larger Society out of existence. The cancer analogy is not a perfect one, though, for when cancer kills its host, it also kills itself—whereas if an eco-community movement subverts the Larger Society, and thereby “kills” it, the eco-community movement itself then thrives even more.

Is this a “utopian” idea? Note that Buckminster Fuller once said that we are already living in a utopian society—in the sense that our society can’t exist (much longer). The only “practical” ideas today are “far out” ones such as the ones that I have been developing!

⁴²¹ See, e.g., the works of Prof. John H. Bodley.

[At this time I have no interest in polishing this file.]

November 1, 2009

The Ideas That Govern Our Behavior

Alton C. Thompson

Some of the decisions one makes are forced on one by a circumstance suddenly confronted—e.g., a car that won't start. Many of one's decisions, however, begin with the selection of a goal to be achieved, followed by the development of a plan of the activities to engage in—and their order—to achieve the desired goal. In such cases one assumes that one's choices along the way have been free ones, unaffected by any external forces; so that if one is questioned on this matter, one is likely to deny, strongly, that one's choices have been something other than free ones. The fact of the matter, however, is that one's "free" choices likely always are influenced by an array of external factors, one of which is the *intellectual superstructure* that is dominant in one's society at the time.

The ideas constituting the societal intellectual superstructure (SIS) currently dominant in the United States are ones that pertain primarily to the economic realm.⁴²² And not only that; they are ones that serve the interests of the elite. As John Kenneth Galbraith, in his elegant discussion of "The Emancipation of Belief,"⁴²³ stated several decades ago regarding specifically "economic pedagogy": "The service of present economic instruction is not to understanding but to the purposes of the planning system.^[424] It is designed, however, innocently, to keep the individual from seeing how he [or she] is governed, to accommodate his [or her] views to the purposes of the planning system.." Meaning that the "inmates" of our society, thinking that they are free, are in fact imprisoned by a set of ideas; ideas of which they are but dimly—if at all—aware, but ideas that play a huge role in their (alleged) "thinking" and "decision-making."

A certain intellectual superstructure, then, forms the "background" of much of our thinking. Not only that: behavior that is shaped by that superstructure tends to serve the (perceived) interest of the elite. I have added "perceived" here, note; and have done so to indicate that members of the elite *themselves* are slaves to this intellectual superstructure. So that even though much of the behavior that occurs in our society serves the perceived (by the elite) interests of members of the elite, it does not necessarily service their "real" interests—either short- or long-run. Meaning (in the latter case) that it fails to serve the interest of *humans as a species*. Not a pleasant thought to contemplate!

⁴²² Such ideas have been of an economic nature for decades; however, the *nature* of the ideas has changed over time.

⁴²³ Chapter XXII in (pp. 242 – 52) *Economics and the Public Purpose*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973, p. 246.

⁴²⁴ Part Three of Galbraith's book is entitled "The Planning System." It comprises Chapters IX through XVII (pp. 87 – 229).

Our intellectual superstructure is, as I've stated, *dominated* by a set of ideas—perhaps better termed *assumptions*—that relate to the operation of our economy. And those assumptions are rooted in two fundamental concepts, that of a “demand curve” and a “supply curve.” However, even more fundamental than these two concepts is the assumption that an economy consists of two distinctly different, yet complementary, parts—producers and consumers. Producers are enterprises, firms; consumers are individuals, organized into households (varying in size from one to X). All firms, however, are also consumers—either in the sense of purchasing with the idea of later selling, or purchasing “raw” materials to use in the production process of the firm.

Returning to demand and supply curves: A *demand* curve (for individuals) is based on the assumption that the higher the price of a given good-service, the fewer-less will an individual be *willing* to purchase of it. Behind this assumption is the further assumption—a very important one—that one gains satisfaction from, and only from, purchasing⁴²⁵ goods-services (then consuming them), so that the lower the price of something, the more one will buy—in the process becoming more and more satisfied. There is recognition that satiety may set in at a certain point; but if this happens, the individual will simply switch to purchasing something else. The limiting factor here, of course, is income, and another part of the set of assumptions involved here is an explanation for why an individual has his particular income—this to be discussed shortly.

If we graph the above assumption, putting quantity of something on the X axis and price of that something on the Y axis, the line describing the assumed relationship will be downward sloping, but not necessarily linear.

Whereas a demand curve applies to *individuals*, and relates to their expected purchasing behavior, a supply curve applies to *firms*, and relates to expected “production” behavior. A supply curve assumes that the higher the selling *cost* of something (which would be the *price* to a purchaser), the more will a firm be *willing* to produce. With quantity sold on the X axis and selling cost on the Y axis, this relationship would yield an upward-sloping line—again one that would not necessarily be linear.

If, for a given area, the individual demand curves are aggregated and the same is done with the supply curves, we have *market* such curves. Given that the curves have different forms, they will intersect at some point, and that point establishes the total amount that will be sold by the various firms (thus the total amount that will be purchased), and the “going” price.

Because different individuals have different demand curves (all having, however, the same basic shape), different individuals will purchase different quantities. And because firms have different supply curves, they will produce different quantities.

Why different individuals have different demand curves is typically not given much attention, and simply dismissed as reflecting unexplainable differences in “tastes.” The supply curve of a

⁴²⁵ Note that the “theory” here assumes that one will acquire things via purchase rather than via theft, as commonly understood. That is, the “theory” assumes “honest” behavior on the part of all the actors, not just rational decisions. The elite needs such a tacit assumption in the model, for it can only take advantage of others if those others are analogous to sheep to be sheared. An economic system within which thievery were allowed—even made meritorious—would be chaotic, and to the interests only of those skilled in thievery.

given firm, on the other hand, is assumed to be established by the manager of the firm (with the assistance of some of his “specialist” employees), and based on calculations as to level of output will yield the greatest profits (determined by subtracting the anticipated costs associated with a given level of production from the anticipated revenue). Of interest regarding firms is that there is an expectation that the greater the level of output of a firm, the lower the per-unit cost—i.e., “economies of scale.” In a given market, therefore, there is an expectation that the larger the firm, the greater will be its per-unit profit and also total profit. This implies that there is a built-in tendency for the firms of a given type (“industry” category) to gravitate to a certain common size (with small firms either expanding their size or going out of business).

Given these basic assumptions regarding how an economy “works,” we are next asked to imagine a society within which there is a certain number of households, all being of about the same size (and with stable demand curves), with the *total* population being stable over time. Next we introduce a number of different kinds of firms into the society, and see what happens. The expectation is that over time there would occur adjustments in what industries were present, how many firms were in each industry, and the size characteristics of the firms in a given industry. At some point, however, a stable (“equilibrium”) situation would emerge. The following would characterize this situation:

- All of that which was produced would be sold.
- This would occur because the price for a given good-service would be at that point where the market demand curve intersected the market supply curve.
- Although the firms in a given industry would tend to be of similar size and have a common profit level, households would vary in *what* was purchased and *how much*. Thus, the level of satisfaction would vary from household to household.
- Level of household satisfaction would vary household income—the higher the income, the higher the level of household satisfaction, *ceteris paribus*. And if household income is held constant, the larger the number of household members the lower the level of *individual* satisfaction in the household (because that which is purchased—a constant between our two households—will go less far with the larger household).

There is recognition here that household income varies, and if we assume that just one household member (the “household head”) is in the workforce, the question arises: How is income variation explained? And the answer is that it is explained by noting that individuals vary in innate ability, they vary in how much effort they expend in developing their abilities, they vary in their willingness to work hard and long, and they vary in their interests. Before exploring this question of income variation, however, we need to bring a special type of supply curve into our discussion.

Again we must bring the time dimension into our discussion, in that we assume that “in the beginning” all households are self-sufficient—so that there is no “market.” However, we also assume that a supply curve can be associated with each household. If graphed, this would show that if a firm were to come into existence, the higher the wage offered by that firm, the more

hours (per, e.g., week) would the household head be *willing* to work for that firm. Why even consider doing this? Because if one gains some income, this would give the household head an ability to purchase some things that he could not himself make (or do, in the case of a service). With a small wage offered, the household head would be willing to work (for the firm) only a small number of hours. Doing so would not reduce the time he needs to spend on his self-sufficiency activities (indeed, it would increase the length of his work week), but would have the “positive” of giving him some discretionary income.

If the firm would offer a higher wage, the household head would be willing to work even more for the firm, for this might allow him to cease making some things for himself and buy them instead—if what he can buy would be of higher quality. His work week might, however, be even longer in this case, because the possibility of earning more from the firm might attract him in enabling him to purchase even more—things that he couldn’t make himself. Thus, he might buy some things that he *could* make himself because those things were of higher quality than his own; and he may buy other things that he *couldn’t* make himself because he believes that they will add to his quality of life. After all, it is assumed here that satisfaction comes from, and *only* from, the consumption of goods and services.

If the wage offered by the firm were high enough, he—being a rational person, whose satisfaction comes from consumption—would decide to abandon self-sufficiency entirely to become a wage worker. Not only would this enable him to purchase what he needs and wants; it gives him some flexibility in where he could live. No longer would he need a large parcel of land (on which to produce what he needs); he can now live on a parcel that provides enough space for a residence, but little more space (e.g., some for gardening). His main consideration now, regarding a residence, is having residence close enough to the firm to enable easy access: being able to walk to work would be the ideal, from both cost and time standpoints.

We can assume that this person’s willingness to work a certain number of hours would have limits, so that we can perhaps best think of our supply curve in this case as being upward-sloping, but curvilinear—so that it would become “flat” at some point. After all, there are only 24 hours in a day, and he needs some time for sleeping purposes, and presumably would also like some “free” time to engage in non-work activities—spectator and otherwise.

Probably the key point of importance here is that the wage paid to someone in our “model” is a wage that the individual is *willing* to accept—that’s what our supply curve in this case is telling us. The significance of this matter of assumed willingness will be brought into the discussion shortly. At this point, however, we need to bring in the assumptions regarding *society* that are a part of our intellectual superstructure.

Following are the key “facts” in this superstructure that relate individuals-households to the society within which they live:

- Individuals live in households
- A society is a collection of households. What makes a particular group of households a “society” is that all identify with the group, the group has a common language, a governmental apparatus may exist that governs the group, etc. A society is a “real” unit

in the sense that those who are a part of it identify with it, but is only real in that sense. It is *not* real in the sense that it can be cited as a causative factor—i.e., as a “contextual” variable—that would explain human behavior.

- The primary individuals in a society are household heads—the representatives of households who make decisions on behalf of the other members of a given household.
- These individuals are rational creatures. As such, they strive to pursue the interests of themselves and other household members as much as possible.
- These individuals do, however, vary in their abilities, willingness to work, and even interests. Ability variation is a function of genetic heredity, education/training, and the degree to which one takes initiative in developing one’s abilities.
- All individuals gain well-being from, and primarily from, the consumption of goods and services (and experiences).
- Positions in the society vary in the amount of ability required for their occupance.
- Positions get occupied in such a way that there is a matching of abilities acquired by the position and abilities possessed by individuals seeking work. As a person works at a job, he may or may not increase his knowledge and skills; if he does so, and as positions above him become vacated (because of promotions, transfers, or deaths), he may be asked to “move up”—with the individual, of those individuals available, who has the highest qualifications being chosen for the job.
- The process by which positions get occupied is *competition*. And although the inclusion of this factor reflects a Darwinian influence (more specifically a *social* Darwinian one), the basis of the competition is different. With Darwin competition is induced by excess births; this results in a “struggle for existence,” with the winners surviving and the losers dying. With our intellectual superstructure what induces the competition is the fact that there is a hierarchy of positions. Individuals try to obtain the highest position possible, but variations in ability result in those with the most qualifications winning the highest positions. The winners in this competition get the highest positions, the losers the lowest—and no deaths occur in the process.
- The higher the position, the greater the ability of the person occupying it, and the more important the position. “Importance” refers to contribution to the smooth functioning of the economy, and contribution to progress (technological especially)—which continued progress leads to an increase in standard of living of all members of the society.
- The higher the position, the higher the level of compensation—to reflect the greater importance of the position. This means that the higher the position, the higher the level

of well-being for the individual occupying the position (along with that person's household members).

- However, given that individuals are compensated in proportion to their contribution to the society, compensation is fair. And if those with the lowest incomes are not able to live in comfort, this is only because either they are not spending their money wisely, or they have low earnings because they are not exerting enough effort to warrant a higher income. Also, the household head (and his wife) may foolishly have had more children could be supported at a comfortable level by the household head's income.
- Given that all households receive compensation in proportion to desert, one with a high income should feel no obligation to give help to the "less fortunate"—because that represents a mislabeling of why such people are not living in comfort. One must keep in regard regarding those who are poor that insofar as they are employed, the wage that they receive is one that they have willingly accepted. And if their earnings are low, this is because they have not developed their abilities to the degree possible, have bad work habits (e.g., are lazy, are often tardy, often skip work, etc.), etc.—so that they have brought their poverty on themselves. Because of this, it would be foolish of others to give them any sort of assistance because that would not help them in the long run—would not result in their changing their ways. It is unfortunate that such people have children, and society has a right to step into such situations by (1) sterilizing such people so that they can't produce more children and/or (2) taking their children from them and giving them to household that, want children, but are unable to have any.
- Government has a role to play in a society (creating and maintaining infrastructure, providing for defense, providing a legal system, etc.), and has the right to tax (individuals, firms, property) to enable it to perform its roles. However, government must not place obstacles in the way of those who want to establish enterprises, nor must it regulate business enterprises. For such actions represent interference in a system, and as such can only be harmful to the system—reducing efficiencies, etc.

People in our society have internalized the above assumptions, and although the set of assumptions exists only in amorphous form in the minds of most, with the assumptions not necessarily in a logical order, this set of assumptions nevertheless governs much of the thinking and activity that occurs.

Whether the elite has been active in promoting this set of assumptions, the fact of the matter is that these assumptions serve the (perceived) interests of members of the elite. (And as I pointed out in another recent paper, sports also serve the perceived interests of members of the elite.) For if a belief that fairness prevails in our society—and one senses that one might be accused of being "un-American" for questioning the free market ideology—one not only will tend not to question Capitalism as a type of economic system (and then advocate Socialism, for example). One will even hesitate to offer criticisms of the Existing Order—or offer ideas to improve the

Existing Order. And if one *does* offer any recommendations, they are likely to be rather mild in nature—so that, if implemented, they would pose no threat to the elite.

It's entirely possible that free market ideology rose to prominence "by itself," without any help from the elite. But at some point the elite became aware of a need to reinforce this ideology in the minds of the populace, so that it has hired lackeys (i.e., intellectual prostitutes) to develop proposals rooted in the ideology—proposals given the appearance of being objective, scholarly, responsible, public interest-oriented, etc. Thus, the elite rules not only via its decision-making, but its suppression—through the efforts of its lackeys—of contrary thought and action on the part of the populace.

Our intellectual superstructure is a highly flawed one in the realism of its assumptions—e.g., its assumption that satisfaction comes only from consumption. Beyond this, however, it is *dangerous* in that encourages behavior that contributes to global warming—which poses a threat to our continued existence. And, it encourages behavior that is contrary to the Bible. For whereas the thrust of the Bible is to answer the question—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—in the affirmative, our intellectual superstructure tells us not to share with others—for doing so will detract from one's own well-being. Although our intellectual superstructure suggests to us that selfish behavior is natural, bred into us by evolutionary forces, this suggestion is based on faulty ideas regarding the mechanisms that were involved in our evolution as humans. Because of this, it contains faulty ideas regarding the sources of well-being.

The fact of the matter is that evolutionary ideas and the Bible are in agreement (!) on this matter—a fact that might surprise "fundamentalists." For the factor of "sexual selection" has resulted in the "breeding" of humans who—among other things—have a need to interact with others, and a proclivity to treat others with kindness and respect. So that it turns out that we are designed to engage in behaviors that are enjoined by the Bible!

Why, then, do we not behave in accord with our "design specifications"? The "Fall" (from gathering-hunting into agriculture) goes a long way in explaining this. For that shift—which occurred by accident, probably—resulted in developments that were inherent in the shift, were not planned. However, because those developments were advantageous to the elite that emerged (which had not existed before), the elite came to recognize this fact, and to promote them. So that ever since there has grown increasing elite control over how development has occurred—the direction of technological development, the direction of institutional development, etc.

It will difficult to accomplish restoration—and would be foolish to try simply to reform the existing system. Instead, a sort of cancer must be spawned that would eat away at the Larger Society while itself gaining strength and complexity. That is, an eco-communitarian movement must be initiated—using my strategy as a guide—and helped to grow. Once it has reached a certain "critical mass," it will be unstoppable. The problem, however, is getting the process started in the first place.

I should note here that my answer to the problem of our being slaves to a certain SIS—a dangerous one, indeed—differs rather substantially from that offered by the late Prof. Galbraith. Galbraith asserted that (p. 248) "if belief [i.e., the ideas constituting SIS] is the source of power, the attack must be on belief." However, the remedy [in attacking belief] (p. 249) "is not illiberal

suppression of the techniques for compelling belief but a truly liberal resistance to such belief. One does not suppress neoclassical economics; one shows its tendentious function and seeks to provide a substitute. One does not prohibit advertising; one resists its persuasion. One does not legislate against science or engineering; one sees their eminence in relation to the arts as the contrivance of the planning system.” Galbraith concludes (p. 249): Not only is this the liberal remedy; it is quite possibly the only one.

Certainly I agree with Prof. Galbraith that we should awaken ourselves—and others—to the fact that our thinking processes are being constrained by that intellectual superstructure that dominates in our society. And I agree that insofar as we attempt to combat the influence of that superstructure, that we do so in a manner consistent with liberalism. However, Prof. Galbraith seemed content with the basic features of Existing Order—e.g., its distinction between individuals-households, on the one hand, and enterprises-firms, on the other hand. So that he was content with societal “tinkering.”

My view of this is that such an approach may have been appropriate in the early part of the last century—so that I can have admiration for what the Milwaukee Socialists did in their long “reign” in Milwaukee. It seems to me, however, that today we are living during a serious period; not only is ill-being far too common in our society (and elsewhere); humankind as such faces the threat of extinction via global warming. We live in a serious time when “radical” thinking is called for. Which is why I favor attempts at converting our society into one of cooperative eco-communities (each with some semblance of a NeWF).

November 1, 2009

Image and Reality

Alton C. Thompson

In the world of commercials smiles are abundant, made so by the consumption of various products (including prescription drugs). This world of commercials is not altogether unreal, true. It is, however, a world that lacks considerably in realism—for on the one hand, (1) many in our society lack well-being; and, on the other hand, (2) the consumption of things (and services) is only a partial path to well-being. Thus, commercials lie to us on two counts.

It is only the first fact that is given attention in the present essay, and I will begin by noting that many in our society are homeless. Either they had been employed and have exhausted their benefits, are families that have lost the “breadwinner” (for whatever reasons), or they lack an ability to support themselves (because, e.g., of mental problems), etc. But regardless of the reasons, they find themselves dependent on rescue missions, churches, etc. for food and shelter—and find themselves living without their basic needs being met well, and living without any sense of security or dignity.

There are those who have homes, but have very low incomes—either because they can only find part-time work, or have fulltime jobs that pay little—and are dirty, menial, and dangerous to boot. And because it is difficult to have a sense of calm and contentment if one is so employed, people in these categories often develop bad habits, which not only represent a waste of the little money they have, but may lead to health or other problems: smoking, drinking, doing drugs, gambling, turning to prostitution, etc. They may have job-related accidents that leave them physically and/or mentally disabled—thus unable to work at all. In desperation, they may turn to criminal acts—robbery, muggings, burglaries, rapes, killings—that may lead to their arrest and incarceration, and that contribute to the ill-being (and even deaths) of numerous innocents. In addition, the ill-employment may lead to tense family situations, thus spousal abuse and child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional). Divorces may occur, which contribute to poverty of the care-giver, and an unhealthy situation for child-rearing. Suicides may occur, having the same consequences. Etc.

Those with more security in their lives may over-eat and/or eat unhealthy foods, resulting in obesity—the loss of friends, and eventual health problems (such as heart diseases). Or they may become so weight conscious that they eat too little—and suffer health problems. Some may experience stress on the job, leading to psychosomatic disorders. Some may feel little stress, but feel bored or trapped. Some may have been born with a physical or mental disability, and perceive it as a barrier which prevents them from achieving in the work world and/or developing good relationships with others.

Then there are those who have a perfectly adequate level of well-being, but have personality and/or behavioral traits that are undesirable: greedy, selfish, dishonest, arrogant, duplicitous, petty, etc. People who are not pleasant to be around. People who may have an exploitative attitude relative to others. People without any sense of obligation to other people, their community, their country. Indeed, people whose actions—within the context of the existing

institutional structure—have gone a long way to causing the various problems enumerated above! Even if the rich have not consciously tried to take advantage of others, the mere fact of a very uneven income distribution within a society is a cause of societal problems. (See, e.g., John H. Bodley's *The Power of Scale*, p. 53.)

Some of the problems that I have identified above (e.g., being born with a disability) are associated with all societies, regardless of type of economy. The question arises, however: If we think of our economic system as being a Capitalistic one, can we attribute most of the problems enumerated above to that particular economic system? Certainly, e.g., Michael Moore's movie *Capitalism: A Love Affair* (currently being shown in theaters) suggests as much. And if the problem is Capitalism, is the answer democracy, as Moore suggests?

I would not place the blame on Capitalism, primarily because I see Capitalism as analogous to a unicorn: it is a word for a thing that has no real-world referent. It is, however, different from "unicorn" in representing an *ideal* for some; they favor some of the attributes associated with "Capitalism"—likely doing so because they see those attributes as being to their advantage (rather than serving the general welfare).

Rather than laying our society's undesirable features at the feet of "Capitalism," I blame the Existing System (whatever it is). And the feature of that System that I see as especially problematic is the existence of two distinctly different entities, the *household* and the *enterprise*. Therefore, I believe the solution to be in replacing those two entities with a single one, the *cooperative eco-community*. (And I do not rule out *ecological company towns*.) In either case (but less so with ECTs) democracy would prevail, and to a greater degree than Moore envisions. (Actually, he said little about his solution, so it is difficult to say much—one way or another—about his "solution.") And, it is important to add, my solution goes beyond Moore's in that I recognize factors other than economic ones that contribute to well-being. Indeed, my NeWF not only in itself would make an important contribution to well-being (i.e., the experience of being a part of one), but likely would lead to decisions that, upon being acted upon, would contribute to the well-being not only of community members but others as well (via the "missionizing" of community members).

A final point: Not only is (unavoidable) ill-being far too common in our society. Our use of polluting fuels is contributing to "global warming," and thus poses a threat to our very existence as humans. To solve this problem we not only need to reduce the per capita usage of polluting fuels; it would be helpful that we would develop peer pressure favoring small families—so that ideally one would only produce one's replacement (two children per family), the only exception granted being adopting unwanted children into one's family. Energy usage per se is not a problem so long as one is using bio fuels; however, scale increases are associated with energy usage, so that because societal problems are associated with scale increase (as Bodley argues), even the use of non-polluting fuels can lead to societal problems indirectly.

November 5, 2009

The *True* Nature of an Anti-Economy

Alton C. Thompson

Chris Carlsson's "Building an Anti-Economy" in the September/October 2008 issue [of *Orion Magazine*] leads me to raise the question: Can an "invention of the future" *really* be accomplished by a process of more and more individuals/households becoming "outlaw bicyclists," "vacant-lot gardeners," etc. (The terms in quotations here are from the subtitle of Carlsson's *Nowtopia* (2008).

I must confess my pessimism regarding the matter. Having been influenced, in my thinking, by, e.g., Prof. John H. Bodley's *The Power of Scale* (2003), I see any given society as a system, with the individual components of that system being mutually supporting—but with one component being dominant, and the others "serving" the dominant. Currently, the Economy is our society's dominant component, with the political, religious, media, entertainment, etc. components being subservient to it.

In saying that our society is a *system*, I do not mean to imply that *particular individuals* have not played a decisive role through our history—that only "social forces" have been the relevant causal factors. With Prof. Bodley and others I agree with the thesis that particular individuals can, and have, played an important role in shaping developments historically. (Jeffrey Kaplan's superb "The Gospel of Consumption" in the May/June 2008 issue provides some interesting evidence.)

Nor do I intend to imply that the various components of a societal system work together in complete harmony. For example, various writers have pointed to the uneasy relationship, over the years, between "free enterprise/market" thinking and Bible-based thinking; troubles between management and labor; conflicts between "pro-life" and "pro-choice" individuals; etc. However, such conflicts have never been serious enough to threaten the continued existence of the Existing Order—in large part (I believe) because the elite has always been successful in controlling our society's basic "intellectual superstructure." So that although we like to think that our thinking is not being influenced by external factors, often it is—and the elite has made a conscious effort to ensure that that continues.

Whether the elite has intended this or not, I believe that an element of our "intellectual superstructure" that has an important influence on our thinking is our tendency to accept, unquestioningly, the dichotomy between "household" and "enterprise"—a distinction that I believe is implicit in Carlsson's article. Because this dichotomy is tacitly accepted by most, we tend to assume, without realizing it, that because households and enterprises/firms *are* distinctly different units in our society, they *must continue* to be. It's as if we believe that this dichotomy is a "natural" one that we *dare* not question.

Yet the fact of the matter is that our country has a rich heritage of "utopian" communities. (In my own state there were a Fourier community, a Mormon one, a Norwegian Moravian one, a Catholic one, etc.) And the "intentional community" movement is still with us.

These communities of the past and present have differed from the conventional settlement in our society, first, in that “household” has been given a variety of interpretations, and, second, in that enterprises have either been community-owned or a mixture of community- and individual owned. My main point here being, however, that with these communities the household-enterprise dichotomy was (and is) by no means as clear-cut as it is in the Larger Society.

The elite would like the household-enterprise dichotomy to remain a clear-cut one in our thinking because such a dichotomy is essential to the elite’s continued control over our economy—and society in general. Despite the possibility that our “salvation” may lie with “converting” our society—to an important degree, at least—into a federation of *eco-communities*, it is unlikely that members of the elite would agree with this assertion: they seem incapable of thinking in long-run terms; they seem incapable of recognizing that they are a *part* of our society, not “above” it.

If a serious effort is made to move our society in an eco-communitarian direction, it will, however, need to be done quietly. Just as Carlsson’s “Nowtopians” “*aren’t* [my italics] waiting for an institutional change from on high but are building the new world in the shell of the old,” so will the Eco-Communitarians *need* to so proceed. Why? Because if the elite becomes aware of such efforts, it likely will try to “nip them in the bud”—recognizing the threat that such an effort poses to them (as parasites and predators).

Resisting an elite is a difficult matter, given its ability to control not only our *actions* but our *thoughts*. But resist we *must*, or we are doomed, I fear. Resistance can take a variety of forms—including most certainly the ones discussed by Carlsson—but perhaps most importantly in recognizing that the prevailing dichotomy between household and enterprise is one that serves the interests of the elite, but not humankind as such.

If we persist in believing that “doing one’s thing” and tinkering with the society are the paths to “salvation,” we run the risk of going the way of the dinosaurs. James Lovelock (of “Gaia hypothesis” fame) predicted recently that by 2100 CE our species will be close to extinction (along with numerous other ones, of course). Although Lovelock himself does not advocate eco-communitarianism, we should keep in mind that being expert in one field does not make one expert in another—and come to recognize that the eco-communitarian path may be our only hope.

In taking that path, however, it is essential that it be taken quietly—so that it is not halted by the elite. Once a movement in such a direction reaches a certain critical mass, it will be unstoppable. But first the baby must grow into adulthood. Let us come to recognize the importance of its reaching that point!

November 9, 2009

Addressing Societal Problems

Alton C. Thompson

There are those who are dissatisfied with *their own* life situation: their job, their spouse, their neighbors, people in the church they attend, etc. Then there are those who are reasonably content with their own lives, but are troubled by various features of the *society* within which they live. In either case one would like to reduce the feeling of dissatisfaction. And although both of these cases are important,⁴²⁶ the focus in this essay is just on the latter sort of person. In doing so, I address the two questions of relevance:

- What are possible sources of dissatisfaction about one's society?
- What courses of action are open to a dissatisfied person, and what are their relative merits?

Let us begin by identifying possible reasons for being troubled about one's society.

Complaints that People May Have Regarding the Society

I should make clear at the outset that my focus throughout this essay is on United States society, and the present. Also, as my intent here is to list complaints that people have registered, there is overlap between some of the points on the list—and a given item on the list may be a cause (or effect) of another item on the list.

- Unemployment is a huge problem—as are under-employment and ill-employment.
- Many in our society are homeless—and not because of personal flaws.
- Many are insecure in their jobs.
- Many find their work experience stressful.
- Remuneration is very unfair: those who have the highest incomes are basically parasites (i.e., individuals who receive of the bounty of the economy, but add nothing of value⁴²⁷)—or even predators (i.e., individuals who are not only parasites, but receive via actively exploiting others)—who may even engage in activities that damage the economy, while bringing profit themselves. Yet these individuals do not perceive themselves this way, nor are they generally so perceived.

⁴²⁶ It is, of course, possible that a given person can be dissatisfied *both* with features of his/her own life *and* features of the society.

⁴²⁷ I am not referring to those who fit this category but have a good excuse—some sort of disability (including being too young or too old!).

- Too many in our society are greedy—they are constantly pursuing more and more.
- Selfishness is common—especially with those who have the most. Individuals may be willing to give to members of their families, and put on lavish parties for their “friends,” but are reluctant to help others in need: “If others are in need, they have brought this condition on themselves through laziness and the development of bad habits.”
- Our society has become materialistic: people value things especially, and want ever more things, especially *new* things. Note here that the attachment here is not so much to *specific* items but things *per se*.
- Our society is materialistic in part because our valuing “equality of opportunity” means that we value “success”—which we tend to interpret in materialistic terms..
- Not only is this not a society of equality of opportunity (as is often claimed—at least as a value); it is becoming ever more a society of extreme inequality in condition.
- Divorce is far too common, and a cause of problems for women and children.
- Alcoholism is a problem—for those with the problem, family members, and others with whom alcoholics have contact..
- For too many in our society (illegal) drug use is a problem.
- Spousal abuse occurs all too frequently.
- There is abuse of children—physically, emotionally, sexually.
- Violence against others—muggings, killings—occurs much too often.
- Suicides occur.
- The press is very superficial in its presentation of the “news.”
- There are too many attempts to manipulation how we think—by commercials, by “think tanks,” etc.
- Too many people are willing to prostitute their talents in service of the business-financial elite.
- Our religious institutions are captive to the dominant economic interests.
- Our way of life is unnatural.
- Diseases—physical and mental—are a problem. The fact that our way of life is unnatural is a major cause of these diseases.

- Our way of life is polluting—e.g., contributing to “global warming.”
- Many deny that global warming is occurring, and fight efforts to address the problem.
- Politicians are controlled by lobbyists rather than expressing the public’s will.
- We support corrupt, undemocratic, rogue regimes abroad.
- We institute wars that are unconstitutional, that result in tremendous loss of life—and that benefit only certain industries-firms. Yet we claim that our military people are “fighting for our freedoms”—and the average person believes this nonsense.
- We interfere in the affairs of other countries—rigging elections, spreading disinformation, assassinating leaders, etc.

If one is aware of societal problems such as those listed above, and that awareness is a source of dissatisfaction, what are one’s options? This is the question that will next occupy our attention.

Responding to One’s Dissatisfaction

If there are aspects of one’s society that one finds troubling, Prairie du Chien’s Walter Cannon can provide us with guidance. Cannon famously identified “flight” and “fight” as the two possible responses to a threatening situation, and we can use those two concepts to identify two basic alternate courses of action for one who is troubled by certain aspects of the society:

- Leave the society.
- Work to “fix” the societal situation.

The first course, in turn, can be thought of as involving two possible options:

- Leave by accomplishing suicide.
- Leave by migrating to a different country.

Likewise, the second general option can be thoughts of as involving two possible options:

- Work to “reform” the Existing Order—by working through existing political mechanisms to get legislation passed that would address the problems that one perceives.

- Work to create a New Order within the Existing one—an Order that would not have the problems associated with the Existing Order—and work for the continual expansion of that New Order, such that it eventually engulfs the Existing Order.

Thus, we have the following possibilities:

- I. Leave the society one lives in,
 - A. By accomplishing suicide.
 - B. By migrating to a different society.
- II. Stay in the society and
 - A. Work to “reform” it.
 - B. Work to replace the Existing Order by creating incipient features of a New Order within the Existing Order, then working to develop/refine those features, while simultaneously working to expand the magnitude of this New Order—until it replaces the Existing Order.

Next, then, let us examine the merits of each of these possible courses of action:

Accomplishing Suicide

If one’s response to feelings of frustration with one’s society is to accomplish suicide, one’s feelings of frustration will go away, true. The suicide of one person, however, will do nothing to solve the problems that caused one to accomplish suicide. If many (non-elite) in a society would take this course, the cumulative effects of these actions would, of course, affect many—including the elite. When the Black Death occurred during the Middle Ages, this impacted the societies where it occurred, including the elites of those societies. It did not, however, result in the solution of any problems—quite the contrary, of course! Still, one would not expect the elite to establish suicide clinics à la *Soylent Green* (without the food production!), because the elite benefits from having a labor force larger than necessary.

Suicide is a *personal* answer to a problem that does nothing to solve any societal problems. Indeed, suicide *itself* is a problem in that it affects negatively the family members and friends of the one who takes this course of action.

Migration

At times one encounters bumper stickers that declare: “America: Love it or Leave it.” Thus, another option would be to migrate to a different country. This, however, takes money; one needs to gain permission from the receiving country; and there are no guarantees that the receiving country would not be without its own problems. Plus, leaving country A for country B would do nothing to solve A’s problems—unless it were so substantial as to result in the removal of most of A’s host population (i.e., the population hosting the society’s parasites-predators). Thus, just as the elite would not support the creation of suicide clinics, neither would it support

substantial out-migration. It might, however, favor in-migration as a means to maintain an over-supply of labor.

Reform Efforts

It has been asserted regarding Theodore Roosevelt that “reform to him was a means of preventing radical social change.”⁴²⁸ This stance by Roosevelt can be considered to be the general one taken by members of the elite. Members of the elite may seem to be opposed to reform efforts—and do, in fact, always oppose efforts that, if implemented, would threaten their position in society. When reforms are proposed, members of the elite examine them from the standpoint of their possible impact on themselves. They tend not vigorously to fight proposals that would have little or no impact on them. If, however, there are proposals that would, seemingly, impact them negatively, they will tend either to (a) fight such proposals so that they go nowhere (e.g., get “buried in committee”) or (b) shape them in a way that will be to their advantage—or at least not impact them negatively. In other words, they will work to co-opt the efforts of reformers—doing so in such a way that the reformers will think they have accomplished a reform when in fact they haven’t.

In short, there is little reason to believe that genuine reforms can be brought about in a society. Even when reforms are “successful,” they may either have a neutral effect on the elite, or actually benefit the elite!

Withdrawal to an Incipient New Order

Several years ago Eugene Linden, in commenting on the United States economy, asserted that “the only threat to the American economy is self-sufficiency.”⁴²⁹ This is a pregnant assertion in that it can be interpreting as suggesting that:

- The Existing Order is characterized by numerous problems. (As Erich Fromm put it a number of years ago, we live in a “sick” society.)
- The Existing Order *cannot* be reformed (because the elite will block any efforts at genuine reform).
- Therefore, those who perceive problems with the Existing Order should remove themselves from it. Not by migrating to a different country (society), however, but, rather by removing oneself from the Existing System while remaining in the United States.

What would such removal accomplish? If one removed one’s household from the market economy, and began a life of “household-sufficiency,” one would thereby have a much reduced “standard of living”—but that in itself does not mean that one would lack well-being. For there are a number different factors that contribute to well-being, having material goods being but one

⁴²⁸ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967, p. 76. First published by The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963.

⁴²⁹ *Affluence and Discontent*. New York: The Viking Press, 1979, p. 176.

of them. If more and more households removed themselves in this way, this would pose a threat to “the American economy”—as Linden asserted. For this removal would mean the withdrawal of support for the Existing Order—labor support, tax support, and purchasing support.

But would it lead to the solution of our society’s problems? Conceivably it could. However, it is hard to imagine that such a conversion of our society could occur. Indeed, Linden was not advocating such a society—knowing full well that it would be neither obtainable nor desirable. Rather, he was engaging in some “if . . . then” thinking to help us realize that at least *conceivably* there was a way of fixing our society that did not involve “reform” as commonly conceived.

On the one hand it is doubtful that the elite would try to stop a movement in this direction. But since it’s unlikely that such a movement would ever become important, there is no reason to think that the elite would ever given a second thought to this sort of movement.

Is, however, there a version of Linden’s solution that could potentially pose a threat to the elite while simultaneously serving to address our society’s various problems? My answer is that I find it conceivable that an eco-communitarian movement could (a) get underway, (b) involve many people, (c) evolve while growing, (d) grow under the noses of the elite, and (e) reach a critical mass such that it would cross a threshold and then become unstoppable. Indeed, I believe that my 5-“wave” strategy is a recipe for such success.

The difficulty is in getting the process started. It needs to be begun by someone with commitment, leadership ability, and resources. That person must be able to disguise his intentions so that it appear that he is doing something innocuous while in actuality laying the basis for a movement. The reasons I suggest beginning with retirement communities are that (a) they are unlikely to raise suspicions, and (b) need not have an economic base.

The problem that I have is that I lack the characteristics needed to initiate a program. I am limited to developing ideas, then trying to get others to implement them. I dare not make too much of an effort to publicize my ideas, however, because of a need to hide them from members of the elite and their lackeys. I just sent a piece to *Orion Magazine*; and although I do not expect them to publish it, if they do, it should do no harm to the movement because it is not very specific. I have sent my “Next American” to several individuals—including Ralph Nader tonight—and hope that eventually something will happen.

Friday, November 13, 2009

The Moral Standing of Terrorism

Alton C. Thompson

Terrorism – “(threats of) violent action for political purposes.”

—Cambridge online dictionary

Is (or *was*—given that he is likely to be executed soon) Nidal Malik Hasan a terrorist? As analysts at MSNBC have recently pointed out, numerous right-wing leaders (TV personalities in particular) have been recently making that claim—likely doing so for political reasons, it might be added.⁴³⁰ These analysts then went on to note that the Army itself made no claims that Hasan was a terrorist, and themselves concurred with the Army’s judgment. What the analysts failed to do, however, was make clear how they were conceiving “terrorism.” Did they agree with the definition of “terrorism” given in the Cambridge online dictionary (see the epigraph above)? Did, in fact, the analysts on a given MSNBC program even agree among themselves in their concepts of “terrorism”?

Because these analysts never clarified the meaning that they were attaching to “terrorism” (because they assumed that its meaning was obvious?), it is not surprising that they failed to raise the question: Is terrorism ever justified morally? Granted that the word “terrorism” has strongly negative connotations (unlike many of our words, such as “chair”). But just because of that fact—the fact that a value judgment is embedded in the word⁴³¹—does it follow that that value judgment must be accepted? In fact, is it not possible that “terrorist” acts could be simultaneously objectionable *and* justifiable?

Given that one does not expect TV analysts to be philosophers—moral or otherwise—it is not surprising that the analysts in question glossed over a number of intellectual problems in their discussion of “terrorism.” It does not, though, follow from that fact that such questions should not be given attention. Indeed, my purpose in this essay is to present some thoughts relative to the question. First, though, it is necessary to present a definition of “terrorism.”

⁴³⁰ One suspects that their motivation is to provide evidence of the inability of the Obama administration to prevent terrorist acts against American citizens—conveniently forgetting the Bush administration’s inability to prevent 9/11. (Indeed, those who believe that the twin towers—and Building 7—fell as a result of bombing, rather than fire caused by the airplanes crashing into the buildings [but not Building 7!], also suspect that the Bush administration may have been complicit in the bombings. That it knew in advance that the buildings would be bombed (by the Israeli Mossad?), that the use of airplanes with Arabs aboard was a “false-flag” operation, and that [the fiction of] an al Qaeda attack would serve the interests not only of the Bush administration but those behind the bombing [the Bush administration by giving them the excuse they needed for initiating a war against Iraq—a war that was unnecessary, illegal, and immoral, thereby making George Bush a mass murderer/war criminal]).

⁴³¹ Many of the words in our language are of this nature. For example, the word “lazy” not only suggests that a given person is rather inactive, but that inactivity is objectionable. Note, in addition, that the word “lazy” conveys an *explanation* of the person’s inactivity—the person has *chosen* to be inactive. That this tacitly-offered explanation may be lacking in merit is made difficult to detect given that the explanation given is embedded in the word itself rather than being made explicit.

The first point that I would make here relative to how I conceive “terrorism” is that invocation of the word involves the (at least) tacit recognition of existence of at least two groups—let us assume just two groups, and refer to them as Group A and Group B. The groups might be identified on the basis of religion, ideology, ethnicity, “race,” etc. One group might be spatially segregated relative to the other group, or some degree of spatial integration might exist between the two groups. A given group might be associated with a government (e.g., be sponsored—perhaps surreptitiously—by a government), or might be a private group (perhaps one that is anti-government, but not necessarily). My basic point here, however, is that activities that I would label “terrorist” are ones that involve *groups*.

Second, “terrorist” activities are perpetrated by members of one group against members of another group. There are different possibilities here:

- Members of Group A may perpetrate terrorist acts against members of Group B, without B people retaliating with terrorist acts against members of Group A.
- Members of Group A may perpetrate terrorist acts against members of Group B, with B people then retaliating with terrorist acts against members of Group A.
- Members of Group A may perpetrate acts against B people that do not qualify as terrorist, but that are objected to by B people, who then respond to those non-terrorist acts with terrorist acts.

There may be other possibilities as well, but in all cases terrorist acts are *purposeful*. That is, A people do not perpetrate terrorist acts against B people simply to have “fun” (or whatever) but, rather, in order to accomplish (they hope) some *purpose*. The importance of this point is that we can, therefore, always ask of certain terrorist acts whether they are *morally justified*. So that even if we concur with the truism that “terrorist” acts *per se* are objectionable, there are cases where such acts might be morally justifiable. Granted that “terrorism” and “terrorist” are words that have negative connotations. But when those labels are applied, there are the possibilities that:

- The label is applied where it is inappropriate. For example, one might very well argue that current right-wing efforts to tag Hasan as a “terrorist” represent a misuse of the word.
- The word may be appropriately used, but one needs to ignore the negative connotations associated with the word and recognize that for the situation where it is employed, the terrorism employed was morally justified.

So far I have proceeded without presenting a definition of “terrorism,” so that it is time (past time?!) that I do so. I have said that “terrorist” activity is *purposive*, and I can now add that the purpose involved is two-fold: there is an *immediate* purpose, and there is a *long-run* purpose. The immediate purpose, of course, is to “terrorize” others; that is, Group A individuals engage in certain activities relative to B individuals to make them *fearful* of their well-being or the well-being of family members; A individuals deliberately introduce stress into the lives of B people—with a long-run purpose in mind. This raises two questions:

- Of what does their “terrorist” activity consist?
- What is their long-run objective?

As to the first question, I would first assert that terrorist activity virtually always involves killing. It may involve hostage-taking for the purpose of extracting a ransom, but such activity always involves at least the *threat* of killing the hostage. Insofar as terrorism does involve killing, the killing is (a) usually of a vicious nature, (b) often involves the targeting of “innocents” (e.g., women and children), and (c) often occurs at unpredictable times (e.g., of the day). Those perpetrating the terrorist activity will often announce that the activities are being done by members of their group; the terrorists may even kill themselves in the process of killing members of the other group (via suicide bombing, e.g.). Usually, however, those perpetrating terrorist acts do not wish to be caught, or their individual identities be made known—for they do not want to be punished for their acts (e.g., executed—by being tortured to death, for example).

Given that terrorist activity by B people against A people is always, by (my) definition, purposive, what is their purpose? In addressing this question I wish to make the point that different purposes are possible, and that some purposes may be more morally justifiable than others. To provide a basis for such a judgment, I will provide a few hypothetical cases:

- Assume a small island occupied by Group A people. These people are all members of a given tribe, and identify themselves with the tribe. The tribe has a certain language, certain customs, and a gatherer-fishing way of life. Given the latter fact, members of the tribe have no concept of the private ownership of property.

At a certain point in time some Group B people from an agricultural-commercial society (and with different language, customs, etc.) begin settling on the island, and commencing agricultural activity. Each household that moves in claims a parcel of land for itself, and more and more households move in.

Initially, the B people cause no problems for the A people, so the A people tolerate their presence—and even interact somewhat with the interlopers. However, a point is reached where so many B people have moved to the island that the livelihood of the A people is threatened (their food derived via gathering especially). Tribal members meet and decide that they must attempt to drive B people from the island. They decide, therefore, that activities that could be categorized as terrorist ones might “do the trick”—and begin engaging in them.

Is their terrorist activity justified? I would say “yes,” given that they could think of the island as their island, and given that B people did not ask for permission to enter the island but, rather, simply moved in. In this example the A people likely would not be *successful* with their terrorist activity, but I regard it as morally justified. It may have been *foolish* of the A people to engage in terrorism, but how could they know in advance that their efforts would be unsuccessful? And even if they did suspect that they would not be successful, given that it appeared that they would be losing their lives anyway, they might have concluded that at least they could lose them in an honorable way—by being killed by attempting to stop the encroachment of B people into their territory.

- Assume that A people live in a country that is totalitarian, but that the rulers of their country are at least not oppressive—so that although they resent their rulers, they feel no particular need to revolt against them. Assume next that the government of Country B convince (e.g., via bribery!) the rulers of Country A to allow them to build several military bases in A—which they then proceed to do. The culture, language, etc. of B differ from those of A; and as bases are established, not only do B military people begin to reside in Country A, but B civilians as well.

The B people in Country A—both military and civilian—regard themselves as superior to A people, and behave in a condescending manner toward them. Not only that, they occasionally rape A women and otherwise behave in objectionable ways relative to A people.

Understandably, some—perhaps many—A people conclude that the B people must vacate their country; after all, the B people, even though they have negatively impacted just a few individuals, represent an insult to the A people as a people. Therefore, knowing that it would be pointless to ask their leaders to request the withdrawal of the B people, they conclude that the best course would be to terrorize the B people—perhaps the B civilians in particular. They thus begin to do so.

Are they morally justified in so doing? Again I would say that the A people are—for they would have a right to maintain the *status quo*, and it would appear that their only course of action in so doing would be to terrorize B people present in their country. Their terrorism activity might or might not achieve the desired objective, of course. But given that it would seem that an alternate course of action does not exist for them, they are justified in using terrorism against B people—even though such activity is *per se* despicable.

- Assume, finally, a country whose population consists of two ethnic groups, with the A group being the larger one, and in control of the government. A people regard B people with contempt (as, e.g., “vermin”), and many of them would like to “purify” the country by driving the B people from the country. Some of them—perhaps with government backing—decide that the best way (i.e., cheapest, most expeditious) to purge their country of this scum would be to terrorize B people. By putting the “fear of God” in all of the B people—given that one cannot predict who will be the next victim of terrorists—these A people hope to convince the B people to migrate to other countries.

The response on the part of B people could be one of two courses:

- They could engage in counterterrorism activity.
- They could realize that irrational people were in the majority in the A group, so that the only rational course of action open to them was to vacate the country.

In this case we have terrorist activity, and possibly also have counterterrorism. The question that arises here is would either of these be justifiable? My answer is that the terrorism of the A people would not be justifiable for the B people have done nothing to

warrant such activity being directed against them, but that the counterterrorism engaged in by B people *would* be justified.

The B people have a right to protect themselves, and would be justified in acting on that right. They may have lived where they do for generations, so that they regard the country they live in as their (rightful) “home” as much as the A people. In fact, their ancestors may have occupied the area for an even longer period of time, so they deeply resent the fact that A people are trying to drive them from their homes.

Whether the B people would be successful in resisting the efforts of the A people is, of course, another matter. Perhaps rather than resorting to (counter-)terrorism they would try to attract the sympathy of the United Nations and/or other countries, and that outside parties would be able to intervene in the situation. My point here, though, is that B people would be fully justified in engaging in counter-terrorism activity. They would, however, be advised to try other options—such as seeking outside help—before resorting to counter-terrorism.

Given the fact that there is terrorism, and then there is terrorism, it would seem that the word “terrorism” is not a very useful word. The word conveys the “message” that terrorist acts are *ipso facto* “bad,” but this is not necessarily true. Granted that terrorist actions are objectionable, even when justified; but the point is that sometimes they *are* justified—because aggrieved parties have no other realistic option for protecting themselves.

Words often (usually?) embed thoughts, and thereby *affect* thoughts; because they embed thoughts they may represent barriers to clear thought. Given this, there should be continuing efforts to purge one’s language of such words and, likewise, continuing efforts to create neologisms that will “cover” a changing—or better understood—reality.

Toward the Good Society

by

Alton C. Thompson

November 19, 2009

Dedicated to the memory of the late Joe Hill

Today is the anniversary of the execution, in 1915 (by firing squad), of labor organizer Joel Haaglund, a Swede who had emigrated to the United States in 1902, and who had changed his name to Joe Hill. One of many less-than-stellar moments in our history!

As Dick Meister suggests today at www.truthout.org/1119094, Hill was a sort of Christ figure who was “crucified” by our federal government and powerful private interests. And, Meister adds: “Organized religion also was a tool of enslavement [at the time], to keep the worker’s eye on that ‘pie in the sky’ while he was being exploited in this world.”

My proposal in this paper gives organized religion in this country a chance to redeem itself!

*You see things; and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'*⁴³²

⁴³² Words spoken by The Serpent to Eve in Part I: In the Beginning of Act I of George Bernard Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch*, 1921. Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13084/13084-8.txt>

Toward the Good Society

Alton C. Thompson

I think of the famous question—“Why can’t we just get along?”—attributed to beating victim Rodney King during the 1992 rioting in Los Angeles—as a sort of parable. What I mean here is that, first, it is not the sort of question that should be given a quick response.⁴³³ Rather, it is a question that deserves careful thought before responding; a question, in fact, that invites discussion with others to find out what thoughts are elicited in others by the question. And because discussion with others is likely to reveal that each participant answers the question in a somewhat different way, such discussion of the question is likely to provoke further thought on the part of each participant, thus further discussion. . . .

Discussion of this question with others may not result in a consensus as to how the question should be answered. But perhaps arriving at a consensus is not the point anyway. Perhaps what Mr. King was (unconsciously) asking us to do was to give serious thought to the question, and then discuss it with others. The hope being that this process of discussion would be fruitful in that it might not only result in creative answers to the question, but the development of a feeling of *community* on the part of participants in the discussion. So that the *process of addressing* the question—as an individual, and as a group member—could eventually result in actions that would make the question itself irrelevant at some point!

What I am suggesting here is that whether or not Mr. King realized it, his question can be thought of as much more than a “mere” question. Those aware of the subtleties embedded in a language will recognize that Mr. King may not have been asking for an *explanation* at all—academic or otherwise. Rather, he was perhaps suggesting (unawares) that the explanation to his question is obvious: “Our society values ‘success’ above all, this engenders interpersonal competition which, in turn, creates barriers between people and puts a strain on relationships—even within the home. If we are to ‘get along,’ we will need to change our *value system*; and to do that we will need to change our *societal system*—but by using peaceful means, of course. To bring about such change, finally, we will need to invent a mechanism that will enable us to move in the proper direction, and begin using that mechanism—the sooner the better. So let’s not dawdle, but get on with it!”

I doubt that all of this was going through Mr. King’s mind when he stated his famous “question.” Yet, I detect, in the plaintiveness of the “question” a dim awareness that we humans *do* have in us an ability to “get along.” After all, most of the time *right now* we are able to “get along” with most others most of the time; and if we Americans have the creativity, intelligence and knowledge that enables us to land people on the moon, surely we have the ability to “figure out” how to bring about the societal system change needed to make “getting along” commonplace in our society. Besides, have not anthropologists determined that our (few-remaining) “primitive” contemporaries have such societies? Have not archeologists concluded that our gatherer-hunter ancestors had such societies? And is there not other sorts of evidence—experimental,

⁴³³ I have found a web site on which two answers were provided to King’s question: (a) We need something to fight about; (b) It’s human nature. Being an optimist, I accept neither answer—and believe that I have solid grounds for rejecting both of these answers.

observational, and theoretical—that provides us with a basis for believing that “re-making” our society is not an impossible task?

It’s true that Charles Darwin’s “natural selection” theory suggests that a negative sort of nature is associated with *all* species. But even some of Darwin’s contemporaries (such as Prince Peter Kropotkin⁴³⁴) knew that the “nature red in tooth and claw” that Darwin claimed as a “law” that ruled in Nature was by no means a law. That cooperative behavior is at least as important in Nature as competitive behavior. So that an innate tendency for aggressive behavior resulting from a supposed “struggle for existence” is uncommon in Nature for the simple reason that the “struggle” that purportedly accounts for aggressive behavior is not that common in Nature.

There is, then, no good reason—theoretical or otherwise—for believing that humans are “naturally” depraved. (Indeed, one has merely to reflect on one’s everyday interactions with others to realize that depravity is not that common.) And, on the other hand, there are solid reasons for believing that humans are “good natured”—as one scientist has put it⁴³⁵—and that the depravity we can observe in our world is more attributable to societal characteristics than to “human nature.” Nazi Germans, e.g., engaged in heinous activities during World War II, but no sane person would claim that Germans are *born* with an evil nature—for if they were, they would be engaged in heinous behaviors on a *continual* basis, and such is patently not the case.

But how can we “bring out” the good that is latent in our fellow citizens—more latent in some than in others, of course? What mechanism can we create that can become a vehicle for societal system change—in the direction of a society that will foster and reward positive human traits? A mechanism that, when implemented, will start us on the journey to the Good Society? In a sense, I have already provided a clue to the answer, because what I propose is the creation of Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs), which would involve discussions on the order of those referred to above.

This suggestion raises several questions, and I would argue that the first one that needs addressing is: “For SIGs to have a significant impact on our society, there must be a proliferation of them, and a rapid one at that. How do you propose that that come about?”

I agree that it likely would be very difficult to interest many people to initiate SIGs, or participate in ones already initiated—even if the meeting place was a short distance away.⁴³⁶ Taking this fact into consideration, and also recognizing that there already exists a strong pattern of people attending church and synagogue services on weekend days, I propose that clergy and lay leaders embrace the SIG idea, implement it in their local congregations—as “services” to supplement

434 His famous book *Mutual Aid* (1902) is available at, e.g., <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4341> .

435 Frans de Waal, *Good Natured: The Origin of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. See also his *Our Inner Ape*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2005.

436 Note that I insist that SIGs involve *face-to-face* contact. This is not to say that I would want to discourage interactions that might occur over the internet; rather, it is to say that I believe that face-to-face contact is potentially of much more value.

their regular worship services—and attempt to draw into their SIG sessions not only participants from the local congregation, but from the local area.⁴³⁷

Given that I have become convinced that SIG proliferation could occur *only* if associated with churches and synagogues,⁴³⁸ in writing this essay I make no attempt to hide the fact that I was raised in Christianity, yet also feel very close to the Jewish religion. I try, however, to make the essay as non-denominational as I can, so that I will not offend the clergy or lay leaders of any particular faith.

Several questions need to be addressed here, and I will provide an answer to each one in turn:

- What personal traits should be common in the Good Society? That is, what personal traits should the Good Society foster?
- What characteristics should the Good Society have in addition to certain personal traits on the part of its members?
- What characteristics should a Structured Interaction Group (SIG) have?
- What rules/principles should govern the behavior of participants during a given SIG session?
- What consequences can be anticipated—for individual participants, for a SIG group as a unit, and for the society⁴³⁹—as a result of SIG participation?

Positive Personal Traits

In identifying positive personal traits I eschew identifying age- or sex-specific traits of a positive nature and attempt, rather, to identify traits having more generality. Although I have tried to arrive at a rather complete list, I have no doubt that I have missed a few important positive personal traits:

Kind/ compassionate

Helpful/generous

⁴³⁷ Many churches have instituted “alternate” services; SIG sessions can be perceived as an alternate type of service.

⁴³⁸ Mosques and other sorts of religious groups as well, I would add—for I do not wish to exclude anyone. I have mentioned only churches and synagogues because I have experience only with Christian ones—having been associated especially with Assemblies of God, Conservative Baptist, United Presbyterian, and United Methodist ones especially during my short life (well, actually, I’m 69—but still *feel* young!). I should also mention that my son is married to a terrific Catholic woman, and I have attended church with them a few times.

⁴³⁹ In that “missionizing” activity—taking various forms—is already associated with most religious denominations, and this usually involves contact with other societies, I would expect that the consequences of SIG participation would “spill over” into other societies. But would lack any imperialistic flavor, one would hope! Haven’t we experienced enough “blowback” as it is (to use a term associated with, e.g., Chalmers Johnson)?!

In touch with one's emotions, and empathetic relative to the feelings of others

Friendly

Respectful/considerate

Tolerant/non-judgmental

Open-minded

Forgiving

Cooperative

Gracious

Courteous

Honest

Impartial/Fair

Trustworthy

Humble, but with self-confidence

Authentic

With a sense of humor

Dependable/loyal

Faithful in relationships with others

Willing to engage others in meaningful conversations with others

Willing to provide encouragement and direction to others

Willing to transmit knowledge/skills to others

Energetic, but also able to relax

Courageous/having determination

Prudent

Curious

Creative

As I conceive the Good Society, members of the society would *acquire* such traits as a matter of course. They would acquire them through a process of osmosis, in a sense: their *experiences* living in the society would tend to shape them in the direction of positive traits; *and* they would be explicitly taught *that* these traits were desirable—and *why*. (Shades of the old McGuffey Readers!)

Insofar as people acquire such traits, and act in accordance with them, they will contribute to the well-being of others. They will resemble Job, who said (29:12-17) that he had given help to the poor and orphans, had helped widows find security, had been eyes for the blind and feet for the lame, had taken the side of strangers in trouble, and in general had always acted justly and fairly. They will also follow Jesus's "plan of salvation" (Matthew 25:31-45) in that they will feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, receive strangers, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, visit those in prison, etc.—if, that is, there *are* people in need in the Good Society. (There are likely to be certain kinds of need even in such a society: individuals born with physical and/or mental disabilities, individuals who have had incapacitating accidents, individuals who acquire a dread disease, etc.)

But the "magic" here is that in acting in accord with positive traits such as those listed above, one not only contributes to the well-being of others, but *one's own* well-being as well. Our present society does not value other-directed behavior, so that it is not surprising that it is not more common than it is. However, in spite of the fact that acquisitiveness, aggressiveness, materialism, and selfishness are rewarded in our (supposedly "Christian"!) society—so that such traits are common with those with wealth and power in our society—many "ordinary" people in our society seem to have the sense to realize that such values are not "right" morally, nor do they bring one contentment. Thus, it is not surprising that psychologist Bernard Rimland,⁴⁴⁰ in a notable study of happiness, found that a higher proportion of other-oriented people tended to be happy than of self-oriented people.

We can be thankful that our society is not devoid of admirable people. Still, our society is by no means without problems—unemployment, homelessness, alcoholism, drug addiction, violence, etc., etc.—and we should not tolerate the continuation of such problems. Whether we are Christians, Jews, humanists, or whatever.

We have the creativity, intelligence, knowledge, and resources to solve such problems. What we lack is the will to address them—and a mechanism to help us. There is, however, the Structured Interaction Group (SIG), discussed next. As one raised in Christianity, however, I feel compelled to add that in John's gospel we were given the promise of a "Helper"—usually interpreted as the Holy Spirit—and that in Paul's letters we have been informed as to what that Helper can do for us. Therefore, I would add that we should not just look to the "mechanism" (i.e., the SIG) discussed and recommended below, but also that "Helper."

⁴⁴⁰Bernard Rimland, "The Altruism Paradox," *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 51 (1982), p. 522. Rimland was director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research. His primary finding of interest was that people who were labeled happy were also labeled unselfish. Thus, we have the irony that supposedly one gains happiness by giving primary attention to "Number 1" (isn't that what Economics teaches?)—but that relevant research provides no support whatsoever to this "priceless pearl of worldly wisdom."

Some Other Characteristics of the Good Society

I will make just a few points here;⁴⁴¹ the reader likely will be able to add others. Let me begin by noting that in driving, this past Sunday (November 15, 2009) from my son's home in Kimberly, Wisconsin, to mine, in Greendale, Wisconsin, I noticed a billboard with a large picture of Bishop Desmond Tutu. I don't recall the exact wording on the billboard, but *do* recall that it indicated that he favored equality. I, too, favor equality (of condition). But because I believe that if in a society the above-listed personal traits are commonplace, there will *be* virtual equality of condition. Given this belief, I see no particular need to list equality as a desirable societal attribute. Indeed, I am not convinced that a society within which there was equality, e.g., in household income would be *attainable*; or if attainable, would even be *desirable*. I would rather "shoot" for a society within which positive individual traits were prized than one wherein income equality were the order of the day.

Should the Good Society have a Department of Defense? Perhaps one would be needed in the near term—but if so, it should be a true department of *defense*. Which is to suggest—correctly I believe—that the current Department is not, and has not been for a number of decades. I have no intention here of rehearsing the offensive—yes, they *have* been offensive!—activities of the Department (to say nothing of the CIA⁴⁴²) over the past few decades. Suffice it to point only to the current war against Iraq as a prime example.

Were our society to become a Good Society—by, say, 2025—it might need to have the capability to defend itself—and perhaps even intervene in certain situations, as we did in Germany after Adolf Hitler rose to power. (A question, however: Had the United States and Great Britain and France had Good Societies in 1930, would conditions have existed in Germany that would have made possible Hitler's rise? I have my doubts!) However, one would like to think that as the United States was in the process of becoming a Good Society, its citizens (and even its government) would be working to make *other* societies Good Societies as well. So that there might not need to be a Department of [True] Defense in 2025. Or if there remained such a need, the Department would not need to be very large—and would be emphasizing *non-lethal* weapons. There *are* such weapons!

Whether or not a Good Society would need a Department of [True] Defense, its members would need to recognize that "global warming" is a very real problem. As scientist James Lovelock (of "Gaia hypothesis" fame) determined a number of years ago, Earth behaves—for reasons not clearly understood—as a system. As such, it uses "negative feedback" mechanisms to maintain relative stability. However, if a system is stressed beyond a certain point—in Earth's case by the addition of "new" carbon (and other "greenhouse" gases) to the atmosphere—the negative feedback mechanisms may cease operating, to be replaced by positive feedback ones. That implies (in the case of Earth), a situation of "runaway"—during which change becomes rapid, until a new equilibrium is reached. NASA's James Hansen has been warning us for years that

⁴⁴¹ Additional points will be added in Section F.2. The orientation of the present section is somewhat different from that of F.2. in that in this section the intent is to identify characteristics of the Good Society *other than* personal attributes of its members, whereas the focus of Section F.2. is on how the behavior of SIG participants might *shape* our society—whether or not intended.

⁴⁴² See, e.g., William Blum's *Killing Hope* at <http://killinghope.org>.

we must address this problem—and soon—but our government does not seem to be overly inclined to heed his warnings. Even with Barack Obama as President.

I should perhaps add, for the sake of clarification, that “global warming” is somewhat of a misnomer, because the accumulation of “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere causes, *ceteris paribus*, not only a *trend* in increase in the global mean temperature, but also increased storminess, an increase in the number of severe storms, droughts (with associated fires), and increased unpredictability in the weather (with these effects *themselves* acting as causes of further problems).

Climatologists are in agreement that the primary cause of global warming is the human use of fossil fuels—using coal to create electricity, using petroleum to power automobiles and trucks (etc.), and using natural gas to heat homes. Given this fact, we need to reduce our overall use of fossil fuels, and this can be done by (a) reducing the *per capita* use (indirect as well as direct) of fossil fuels, and/or (b) working for population size stability (or even decline) rather than continued growth. The latter, of course, raises moral issues, thus is a topic upon which it would be difficult to obtain consensus—even in the Good Society; and for that reason is an avenue unlikely to be taken. Reducing the *per capita* use of fossil fuels, on the other hand, raises few, if any, moral issues, and therefore is an avenue holding much more promise. Again, there is a two-fold approach possible here, one being to (a) reduce *per capita* consumption of goods drastically so that less energy is needed in producing goods, and/or (b) develop alternate (non-polluting) sources of energy to replace fossil fuels.

Prof. John H. Bodley has stated in a recent book that as “the scale of human societies increases, at least five things are likely to happen:[443]

(1) per capita economic productivity and consumption increases, but the product become more inequitably distributed;

(2) democracy declines, because decision making becomes more cumbersome and more concentrated;

(3) institutions and technologies become more specialized, more complex, more costly, and more vulnerable;

(4) the pace of change and instability increases; and

(5) all types of social power become more concentrated.”

In short, although a “progressivist” (Bodley’s term) mentality prevails in our society—so that we tend to assume unthinkingly that growth is good, big is better, technological “progress” is inevitable, etc.—the fact of the matter that there is a trade-off that occurs as a society develops in the conventional way: with “development” there may be various “pluses,” but will also be various “negatives”—and who is to say that the negatives aren’t more important than the “pluses”?

443 *The Power of Scale: A Global History Approach*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003, p. 66.

At any rate, one recommendation that might be made is to recognize that “scale” *does* present serious problems,⁴⁴⁴ and to address that problem by encouraging the development of small, relatively self-sufficient communities—and making them *eco*-communities so that they would simultaneously address (somewhat, at least) the “global warming” problem and those problems, identified by Prof. Bodley, that are specifically related to scale.⁴⁴⁵

Characteristics of a Structured Interaction Group (SIG): Introduction

The Structured Interaction Group (SIG) is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France);⁴⁴⁶ a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries;⁴⁴⁷ and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a SIG my personal experience with the adult “Sunday school” class at the church that I have been attending since 1980. The group has consisted of individuals who have certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group has his/her unique personality, each has had different life experiences, different educational levels are represented, etc. The group is not a random sample of American society, of course, but still is rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views are represented. Despite the latter fact, we all have felt free to express our views (so long as they are not too “heretical”!), because we know that the others in the group would respect them; for there has been a general consensus in the group that we are all “seekers,” and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I have led this group at various times, and have, during those periods, attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. So that when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes’s *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (cited earlier), I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group has been extremely important in my own spiritual

444 See also Kirkpatrick’s huge book (!) on the virtues of smallness: *Human Scale*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980. I should also mention E. F. Schumacher’s famous *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

445 If nothing else, taking such a course would be potentially much safer than following the path of “geo-engineering”—promoted, e.g., by Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner in *Freakonomics*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 2005.

446 Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 41-43.

447 Medicine Story, “Circles of Freedom,” *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, “Calling the Circle,” *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox “out of the blue.” How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves), and until recently I have attended these Sunday sessions “religiously.”

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as “love the neighbor” is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a “fleshing out” of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps “energize” them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a “natural high”) during a given SIG session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to have a “high” that lasted continuously for over three months.⁴⁴⁸ I don’t know why I was granted this valuable experience,⁴⁴⁹ but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon cross-culturally and historically.⁴⁵⁰ And, second, believe that such an experience was common with the first “Jesuans.”⁴⁵¹

Characteristics of a Structured Interaction Group (SIG): Specifics

What is a Structured Interaction Group? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

⁴⁴⁸In addition, two books have given me a “natural high”: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: New American Library, 1958. First published by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1904. Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912. I read the first book in 1959, the second in 1984.

⁴⁴⁹During that period my perceptions changed so that, e.g., I was perceiving differences in *kind*, but not *degree*. I recall, e.g., talking to a young woman during that period, encouraging her to run for a local political office. She responded that she felt that she was somewhat of a freak in being rather tall. Up to that point I had not noticed that “fact” about her. The “lesson” that I learned from that experience is that although it is “natural” to perceive differences in kind, such is not the case for differences in degree: such differences are ones that our minds *impose* on reality.

⁴⁵⁰See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

⁴⁵¹For a brilliant discussion see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1995. See in particular Chapter 12 (“The Christian Cult,” pp. 170 - 87).

Participants in a given SIG meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”⁴⁵²); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random⁴⁵³) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one SIG session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a SIG is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation⁴⁵⁴ were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four SIG sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first SIG, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random procedure. This means not only that participants in a SIG do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense).⁴⁵⁵ Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The SIG, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a

⁴⁵²The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

⁴⁵³Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

⁴⁵⁴ I recommend that SIG sessions *not* be restricted to members of the particular congregation involved—that, indeed, an effort be made to bring “neighbors” into the group—to increase the degree of diversity of participants.

⁴⁵⁵See, e.g., writings by Michael Parenti and G. William Domhoff.

SIG all accept Jesus's love of the neighbor command as their central "creed," the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to that creed.⁴⁵⁶

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity.⁴⁵⁷ It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet's remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a "talking hoop"⁴⁵⁸ passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet's immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles⁴⁵⁹

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during SIG sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept

⁴⁵⁶I am reminded here of Matthew Fox's statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. (*Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 ("Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey").

⁴⁵⁷In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to SIG participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998). For example, Shepard states (p. 155): "Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself." Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have "designed" us for such an activity.

⁴⁵⁸Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus symbolizing well the goal of a SIG to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, *Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

⁴⁵⁹Compare with Paul's comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

the truism that one person's views are as worth of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.

- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one’s truth”⁴⁶⁰ and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
- d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given SIG will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting

⁴⁶⁰This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a “talking hoop” (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Structured Discussion Group are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the SIG, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the SIG is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the SIG has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.⁴⁶¹

Possible Consequences of SIG Participation

George Edgin Pugh, in his important *The Biological Origin of Human Values*,⁴⁶² discusses “instinctive human motives” (pp. 284 – 87), and among them lists an enjoyment of conversation.⁴⁶³ The Structured Discussion Group (SIG) implicitly recognizes this as an

⁴⁶¹One with a scientific background might say that the SIG represents an “operationalization”—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

⁴⁶²New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977.

⁴⁶³His complete list: (1) a desire for dominance (rivalry), (2) a desire for approval, (3) a desire for social acceptance, (4) gregariousness, (5) the enjoyment of conversation, (6) an activity motive (a desire to exercise the body and develop physical skills), (7) the enjoyment of humor in conversation and play, (8) social preferences, (9) a team motive (a desire to work with others for common goals), (10) a constructive motive (a desire to make/build things), and (11) a contribution motive (a desire to contribute, to do something meaningful for one’s society). Pugh notes (p. 285) that “the proposed list of instinctive motives is sure to be controversial . . .,” but may only (partial) objection is to the first motive he lists—a desire for dominance. I would assert, rather, that individuals naturally vary in their position on a leader-follower continuum. The fact of this variation can—under certain circumstances—lead to some individuals, in acting on the motive, becoming autocrats. Yet, it is not inevitable that this occur. Although generally I see a tendency toward dominance in negative terms (and have designed the SIG to control the tendency, while also encouraging leadership tendencies in those more inclined to follow), I also recognize that any society needs both leaders and followers. In fact, if my SIG proposal is to “get off the ground,” some individuals with leadership qualities will need to “start the ball rolling”—and others who are more inclined to follow will need to perceive the value in the movement, and become a part of it as followers. There is, of course, a danger in those with followership tendencies to become too passive, submissive, and those with leadership abilities to recognize this tendency in others, and take advantage of it—by becoming autocratic. I believe, however, that SIG participation can foster the development of “habits of thought and action” such that these “natural” tendencies become suppressed—at least to the point that they do not pose a threat to the society.

important motive (or *need*, if you prefer), and uses it as the basis for making the fulfillment of that need a vehicle for bringing about the Good Society—i.e., a society within which the positive individual traits listed above are not only commonplace, but are fostered by the society.

Participation in a SIG can have a great variety of consequences, and in this section I wish to identify and discuss possible kinds of consequences, under several headings. I identify only *positive* consequences because—frankly—I believe that only such consequences would result from SIG participation!

Possible consequences of SIG participation can be identified and discussed at three different “scales”: (1) implications for SIG participants—as individuals and as a group; (2) societal implications; and (3) implications for other societies. Each is discussed in turn, but first some introductory comments.

Let me begin by asserting that if there is magic in ritual,⁴⁶⁴ then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture.”⁴⁶⁵ The “magic” in a SIG, it seems to me, lies in one’s being aware of the possible consequences associated with participation in a SIG. That is, if one knows in advance what sorts of consequences participation in a SIG may have, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one’s thinking and behavior, *foreknowledge* of possible consequences of participation can also impact one’s thinking and behavior.

I find it interesting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher Max C. Otto,⁴⁶⁶ in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that

⁴⁶⁴Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991.

⁴⁶⁵Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899. In actuality, however, institutions should *not* be regarded as “furniture”—as things that are “just there.” For a central assumption of this essay is that institutions play a highly significant role in *shaping* thoughts and action. If I did not believe this, I would not be proposing the creations of SIGs!

⁴⁶⁶*The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life*. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V (“Realistic Idealism,” pp. 128 - 53).

such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the SIG, because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in SIG sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a SIG fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

1. Implications for Participants

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a SIG would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a SIG, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the SIG in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a SIG proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the SIG—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the SIG's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a SIG as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a SIG—the individual “crazinesses” will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.”⁴⁶⁷ (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Precisely because I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from SIG sessions, I believe that there will be *sociological* implications for participants. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and

⁴⁶⁷See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, “Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy,” in *Modern Therapies*, edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the SIG has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the SIG’s design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the SIG is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a SIG can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking one’s mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one’s interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one’s claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control⁴⁶⁸ others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies⁴⁶⁹ may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a SIG will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the SIG as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will

⁴⁶⁸They may perceive this as exercising “leadership,” rather. That is, they may put a positive “spin” on their objectionable behavior.

⁴⁶⁹For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

experience improvement in their physical,⁴⁷⁰ emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the SIG experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.⁴⁷¹ And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective⁴⁷²) blasphemous.

Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.⁴⁷³ On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit;

⁴⁷⁰Including psychosomatic ones. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man’s Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

⁴⁷¹Few Christians seem to understand the fact that “God” can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept see Daniel C. Maguire, “More People: Less Earth: The Shadow of Man-Kind,” in (pp. 1 - 63) *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four (“God: The Heart of Reality”) in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

⁴⁷²See Raymond Panikkar, “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

⁴⁷³Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and the movie *Groundhog Day* (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are *systems*, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the

and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity “out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being,). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as *also* constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Despite the fact that participation in a SIG likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a SIG will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked”⁴⁷⁴ Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a SIG can one experience Deity in our society,⁴⁷⁵ I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience.”⁴⁷⁶ A SIG, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a SIG can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the SIG. If SIGs involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to

society and the dominant value system associated with those “peopling” the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, but this is not the place to present that strategy.

474“The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

475L. Robert Keck has introduced “meditative prayer” as an alternate “path to the Spirit.” See his *The Spirit of Synergy: God’s Power and You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his Chapter 7 (“Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime”), refers (p. 125) to “the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about,” and (p. 126) hitting the wall in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

476Marraine C. Kettell, “Becoming Ourselves,” a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

humankind's survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind's very existence is currently being threatened by "global warming," among other factors.⁴⁷⁷

2. Societal Implications

The reference here is specifically to *our* society, the following subsection making a few comments on implications beyond our borders. The reference to "global warming" in the previous paragraph should perhaps be included in this subsection; but as its reference is to humankind, and uses a term—"salvation"—more commonly used in discussing individuals than humankind in general, I thought it more "natural" to place it where I did.

Given that my primary concern herein is with the Good Society—which I am defining as a society within which various positive personal traits are commonplace, and which fosters the development and retention of such traits—the first point to make here is that I foresee that among the ideas generated during SIG sessions will be ideas regarding how to change the "shape" of the society so that it will "produce" and value members who have the personal qualities listed earlier. Individuals vary, of course, in their genetic endowment and in their experiences (etc.)—meaning that some members of the Good Society will possess positive traits to a greater degree than others. But even with a given member there will be variation *over time* in the degree to which one possesses any given positive trait: even the best of us will feel anger, envy, etc., and be rude, presumptuous, etc. at some time.

Insofar as there is a proliferation of SIGs within the society, those associated with them have the best chance of acquiring positive traits, and as habits. But other mechanisms/institutions might also come to be created that also have such an effect. I have already mentioned the small eco-community⁴⁷⁸ as an institution that might help address the "global warming" problem, among other problems. I would add here that the mere fact of living in such a community might also so contribute. I hesitate go beyond what I have already stated on the subject, given that I expect SIGs to generate creative ideas—and that it is impossible to predict in advance what shape they might take.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there are likely to be changes in the governmental structure of the society, so let me briefly comment on possible changes in that realm. One change that I would anticipate would be the elimination of bicameral legislatures—a change that would be made difficult because involving constitutional change, but a sort of change that is at least conceivable (especially if a society is a Good Society, as I have defined it). At present, only the state of Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, and I am not aware that Nebraskans regard that as a problem. Given this, why not rid our society of the U. S. Senate and

⁴⁷⁷See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

⁴⁷⁸I especially have in mind cooperative eco-communities (CECs), but should also mention Ecological Company Towns (ECTs)—the former involving community ownership of all real property, the latter such ownership by an individual or firm. A "plus" associated with both from a "global warming" standpoint is that they would eliminate the need for journey-to-work trips involving the use of an automobile. Rather, one could simply either walk or bike to the place of employment.

all other “upper” legislative chambers? Bicameral legislatures were created in the first place to block democratic decision-making—and perhaps are appropriate for societies within which the positive personal traits listed earlier are not common. Their purpose, however, would be non-existent in the Good Society, so that their existence would only serve to make governmental decision-making cumbersome—and more expensive than it would need to be.

Assuming this sort of change, an additional sort of change that is recommended is to change how legislators—often called “representatives,” without good reason!—are selected. Currently, they are commonly selected from electoral districts or are elected “at large.” The former method is subject to “gerrymandering” (an issue addressed by the Supreme Court especially in the 1960s), and neither method will ensure a “replica of the realm” legislature (or “portrait in miniature,” to use John Adams’s terminology). Existing methods of selecting legislators should be replaced with some sort of “proportional representation” system—such as the “list” system (in which case one votes for a “party”—which develops a list of candidates, and lists individuals in order of the party’s judgment as to qualifications), which produces a “representative” (in a statistical sense) assembly in that seats are awarded in proportion to number of votes received by party.

Related to these changes of an institutional nature, there would be a disappearance—one would hope!—of the lobbyist as an “institution”! This change might not please lobbyists, but because there would be a reduction in firms and other organizations wanting to hire lobbyists, there would be little demand for such people—so that people having this employment would be forced to seek employment elsewhere.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there also would be changes—significant ones, most likely—in the society’s economy, so that it is also advisable to comment on anticipated changes in that realm. I foresee two changes as of especial importance—these having a variety of implications, some of which I will mention below. First, the *per-capita* consumption of goods is likely to be reduced substantially. Second, “production for use” is likely to become more common than it is now.

Recently, during a church service, we were handed a card with the following quotation from Adam Hamilton’s *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity*:⁴⁷⁹

Lord, help me
to be grateful for what I have,
to remember that I don’t need most of what I want,
and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.

As my discussion above suggests, I agree entirely with this statement, but would add that I regard it as rather incomplete. (But, then, a small card will not accommodate many words!) Most importantly, I would add that anyone who comes to recognize that s/he doesn’t really need most of what s/he has will then—logically—give that excess to those who *can* make use of it (or

⁴⁷⁹ Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.

simply discard that portion that would not be needed by anyone), and change future buying habits. This changed purchasing behavior may be combined with a desire to oneself produce for at least some of one's needs (e.g., by engaging in gardening, building one's own furniture, etc.), and insofar as these changes occur, the implications for the economy can be considerable. Given that many goods currently consumed would no longer be purchased:

- Many production facilities in this country would be forced to close down.
- Many goods currently imported would no longer be.
- Many retail stores selling such goods would be forced to close.

Such changes would likely result in many people moving from larger cities to smaller ones—or to eco-communities or rural areas.

The fact that the number of work and shopping trips would decline greatly would mean that automobile (and automobile parts) production-importation would be reduced, as would be the number of automotive service stations, and automotive repair shops. Petroleum refineries would also be forced to shut down—but there likely would be the development of facilities for producing biofuels (from algae, e.g.).

Insofar as structures would continue to be built,⁴⁸⁰ they likely would be built to be energy-efficient and less subject to deterioration over time. Therefore, there would be a shift in the production of materials used, and less new building during a given year.

Although work- and shopping-related movement might be reduced substantially, I would expect a significant increase in travel for sightseeing purposes—trips to experience natural features such as the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Devil's Tower, etc., and also trips to visit historical sites such as restored Shaker communities, the Washington monument, Gettysburg, etc.

A final point that I would like to mention in this subsection is that insofar as positive personal traits such as the ones listed above become commonplace, there would be little need for police officers, lawyers, judges, prison officials-guards, etc., so that those professions would basically disappear.

Note that I have been referring to the disappearance of many jobs/professions as a “natural” accompaniment to the development of the Good Society, and a question likely to arise is: What will these unemployed people then do?! One suggestion I will offer here is: Create an eco-community for yourself and others, or move to one already existing! What I am hoping is that enterprising individuals—whether or not unemployed—will step forth to create a new sort of

⁴⁸⁰ Likely there would be less construction activity because the economy would become less “dynamic”: there would be less economic activity, less growth in such activity, less internal migration in response to economic shifts of a geographic nature, etc. For discussions of the virtues of, and prospects for, a non-growth economy see, e.g., Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (second edition); and Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*. Sustainable Development Commission, n.d.

Available at: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity_without_growth_report.pdf

capitalistic society! Michael Moore's recent movie *Capitalism* suggests that capitalism is inherently an evil sort of economic system. Michael, please read this paper; you may change your mind!

3. Implications for Other Societies

I will be very brief here. Movement, within our society, in a Good Society direction will mean that more and more of our fellows will develop positive personal traits. In acting on those traits they will act not only to make our society a better place to live, but will do the same for other societies. In doing so, I would only caution them to be sensitive of cultural differences that exist between other societies and ours so that we will refrain from doing unintentional damage to the fabric of other societies.

Conclusions

The intended audience for this paper is clergy and church lay leaders. I anticipate that such individuals who find merit in the proposal I offer herein would use this paper as a resource for writing *their own* papers (along with announcements, advertisements, etc.). In doing so, I would expect them to write papers (etc.) that would reflect their particular theological views, and would emphasize points that *they* deemed as of especial importance. Finally, I would expect that whatever literature they write, it would not be as burdened with footnotes as the paper in front of you!

Should you choose to act on my proposal here, you are not under any obligation—it goes without saying—to refer to the discussions groups involved as Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs). I have, myself, in writing about the concept over the years, used different terminology—such as Kingdom of God Fellowship (suggesting that the kingship of God occurs when individuals follow God's Word—obtained via revelation in this case), Seminoar (the “oar” here alluding to a Viking spirit of adventure—my ethnic heritage being Norwegian and Swedish), and New Word Fellowship (the “new word” alluding to revealed truth, obtained via continuing revelation of the sort believed in by Quakers⁴⁸¹).

Unless one lives in a cave, one is fully aware of the fact that we are living in dangerous times—with not only the threat from thermonuclear weapons, but also “global warming.” Personally, I view the latter as our most serious threat because it appears that we are marching inexorably toward oblivion: Scientist James Lovelock predicted recently that he expects our species (along with many other ones, of course) to be close to extinction by 2100 CE, and I have a great deal of respect for his views (regarding “global warming,” at any rate). A “technological fix” sort of solution to this problem (such as being advocated by “geo-engineers”) runs the risk of having unpredictable side effects that might be worse than “global warming” itself. And a switchover to alternate (non-polluting) energy sources will be difficult given the influence of vested interests in continued fossil fuel use. Besides, such a switchover—if it could be accomplished soon—would address the “global warming” problem while allowing all of our other problems to continue, and even worsen.

⁴⁸¹ A friend and I attended a local Quaker service together a number of years ago.

Although I am not a Quaker, I am a firm believer in continuing revelation—which is why I place so much faith in the SIG as a vehicle for ushering in the Good Society. We humans have been creating our own “flood” over the past 250 years (ever since the Agricultural Revolution, in fact?), so that if we manage to destroy ourselves (and many others of God’s creatures) through our arrogance and foolishness, we will be committing the most terrible kind of blasphemy.

Rather than continuing in our errant ways, why don’t we wake up and take heed of Jesus’s promise of leaving us with a Helper. I was raised by parents, who themselves had been raised in a Norwegian Lutheran church, but with others helped build an Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, Wisconsin. Although I long ago drifted away from that denomination, I recall with fondness having black missionaries from Africa visiting our church, singing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” with the other children in the congregation—and learning the truth that there *is* a Holy Spirit. I perceive the Structured Interaction Group as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit speaking to us today—and would even go so far as to claim that the *idea* for the SIG was granted to me by the Holy Spirit.

The SIG may not be the only answer (indirect and direct) to our problems as Americans and as humans. I am convinced, however, that it *can* be a significant answer. However, it is an idea that will gain life only if clergy and church lay leaders embrace it, and act on it. Amen (i.e., may it be so).

Today's Mission: A Proposal

by

A. Charles Thompson I

November 19, 2009

Dedicated to the memory of the late Joe Hill

Today is the anniversary of the execution (by firing squad), in 1915, of labor organizer Joel Haaglund, a Swede who had emigrated to the United States in 1902, and who had changed his name to Joe Hill. The execution was one of many less-than-stellar moments in our history!

As Dick Meister implies today at www.truthout.org/1119094, Hill was a sort of Christ figure who was “crucified” by our federal government and powerful private interests. And, Meister adds: “Organized religion also was a tool of enslavement [at the time], to keep the worker’s eye on that ‘pie in the sky’ while he was being exploited in this world.”

My proposal in this paper gives organized religion in this country a chance to redeem itself!

*You see things; and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'*⁴⁸²

Introduction: A Personal Note

“I am a part of all that I have met”

--Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses*

[“And I wouldn’t have it otherwise!”—ACT I]

I was born (in 1940) in a house in Wautoma, Wisconsin (my parents’ house having burned down a few weeks before I was born—just before Christmas).

I grew up in rural/small town America (in Waushara County, Wisconsin).

I spent my first two school years in a one-room country school.

I spent the next six years of grade school at a Normal School (many of which were common in Wisconsin at the time). In effect, this was also a one-room school for the two dozen or so of us grade school students housed in the same home room, with the student teachers in the two-year (for them) program being housed in a larger room next door. The school was run by Lulu (“Miss Kellogg”) and Vivian (“Miss Vivian”) Kellogg, the former being the school’s principal, the latter in charge of teaching music and running the kitchen. I have many fond memories of those six years, but especially appreciate the fact that “Miss Kellogg” taught an eighth-grade civics class (along with teaching in the teacher-training part of the program), and attempted to instill in us students a sense of civic responsibility. I also fondly remember singing in Miss Vivian’s pageants, e.g., at Christmas time (during a period when public schools having religious pageants was permitted!).

My dad’s parents (and mother’s also) had been farmers near Mt. Morris (in Waushara County, Wisconsin), but because grandfather had contracted tuberculosis, the family was advised to move to the southwest. As my grandmother had worked in the household of Otto Schnering (founder of the Curtis Candy Company in Chicago—e.g., Baby Ruth and Butterfinger candy bars) prior to her marriage, and had traveled extensively with them, including to California, they decided to move to San Bernardino, California. My dad went to high school there, but quit before graduating, and worked for a time as a draftsman—but then returned back home to the Mt. Morris. He began working as a carpenter, and a few years later married my mother (who had but an eighth-grade education).

My parents had been raised in a Norwegian Lutheran church, but some time after their marriage decided that that church was too “dead”—evidently having been helped to reach that conclusion by a traveling evangelist who held some services in Wautoma. They then got together to establish the Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, and I was raised in that church. I have

⁴⁸² Words spoken by The Serpent to Eve in Part I: In the Beginning of Act I of George Bernard Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah: A Metabiological Pentateuch*, 1921. Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13084/13084-8.txt>

little recollection of my years there, though, except for a few black missionaries visiting the church from time to time and showing slides, singing songs with the other children (such as “Jesus Loves the Little Children”), and seeing people “speaking in tongues” from time to time—especially at the camp ground that the denomination had established not far from Mt. Morris. I also have memories of my mother reading Bible stories to us children in the evening, and my dad reading the Bible to us.

When I was in my early teens, my parents left the Wautoma church (for reasons that I am not clear about), and began attending the Conservative Baptist church in nearby Wild Rose (a small community with a strong Welsh presence). I recall little about that experience except that it made me feel somewhat as an outsider as a high school student, given that most of my classmates were either Lutherans or Catholics. Why couldn’t my parents have remained in the Lutheran church?, I thought to myself more than once. Looking back, however, I’m glad that I had that experience, for it helped me develop a questioning attitude that I might not otherwise have developed.

After graduating from high school (as valedictorian, of a class of 57) I attended what was then called Wisconsin State College, Oshkosh. I majored in History, and minored in English and Geology, intending to become a high school teacher. However, at some point while I was a Senior, the Geology Department head announced to me that a Faculty Assistant in Geology and Geography was opening there the following year, and asked me if I would like to have the job. I took it, and while in that position was encouraged to go to graduate school, thus applied to the University of North Carolina, was accepted there, and in 1965 received a M.A. in Geography from that university.

Since that time I have done a number of different things, including getting married and having children, living in Maryland and Ohio, and then returning to Wisconsin—but to the Milwaukee area. While a college/university student I was basically unchurched, but the woman I married (from Wisconsin, but we met while I was a student at the University of North Carolina) was a United Presbyterian, so we were married in that church (while living in Maryland), and remained associated with that denomination for about 15 years. During that time I came to admire Presbyterian ministers for their ability to deliver—and with some degree of passion—thoughtful sermons. A conflict which developed between a pastor’s wife and my wife (at the time a church secretary, after our return to Wisconsin), however, caused us to search for a new church, and we eventually decided on a United Methodist church—of which we have been members since 1980. However, we have not been very happy with the last two ministers of that church, and have therefore been attending two other United Methodist churches (which happen to be led by ministers who were formerly at our current church), and may switch our membership shortly.

What I have found attractive about the church to which we currently belong is that it had an active adult discussion group when we joined, and it remained lively for a number of years. However, the “health” of the group declined somewhat over time—in part because of members moving to other locations—and that decline, along with a dissatisfaction with the church’s ministers, is what has caused us to basically stop attending that church’s services.

For roughly the past 25 years I have been a somewhat avid reader of scholarly literature dealing with Christianity (the early years especially) and religion in general, and this has broadened and

deepened my thinking about religious matters. I have also tried to keep abreast with developments in our society and world—especially beyond the “mere” political realm—and have tried to make a connection between my role as a citizen and role as one who has been associated with Christianity. In doing so I have, of course, been influenced not only by my reading, but my exposure to different Protestant denominations (and even Catholicism, as my best friend is a Catholic, and my son married a wonderful Catholic woman), and my life experiences.

Had my life to this point been different from what it was—had what I have met been different from what it was (to allude to the Tennyson epigraph)—I likely would be a different person. But because I have no desire to be anyone other than who I am, I am thankful for the life that I have had to this point. Not that I am by any means some sort of ideal to “hold up”—for I know that I have at least my share of faults. But I am not claiming perfection. I am merely saying that I spend no time wishing that my life had been different than it has been—e.g., that I had had different parents; and I recognize that the ideas and opinions that I express in this paper reflect my life to this point.

My background—along with the fact that I have three children, and now three grandchildren as well—has led me to develop an especial concern for our future as humans—and to ask myself what I can do to ensure that my grandchildren have a good future—have, indeed, a future at all. For the existence of thermonuclear weapons by our country and other countries poses an ever-present threat to humankind’s continued existence; and “global warming” presents (I believe) an even more insidious threat—for it is so much easier for us to conceive of bombs as a threat than automotive exhausts. I, for one, take scientist James Lovelock’s recent prediction that by 2100 CE our humans will be virtually extinct serious.⁴⁸³ Indeed, given that some scientists predict that by 2100 CE 60% of all species now existing will be extinct, one has good reason for wondering if our species will not be among that 60%.⁴⁸⁴

It is entirely possible, I suppose, that alternate sources of energy will be introduced soon, and quickly become substitutes for (polluting) fossil fuels—thereby reducing, if not eliminating, the threat of ecocatastrophe. However, I am not optimistic that that will occur—soon enough to prevent ecocatastrophe from occurring. And even if we *are* able to develop a “technological fix” for the “global warming” problem, that “fix” will do nothing to solve our society’s—the world’s, in fact—*other* problems. Of which we have many—homelessness, poverty, disease, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, child abuse . . . I’m sure that you can continue this list on and on.

I believe that it *is* possible to address all of these various problems simultaneously—but only by changing the nature of our societal system. Not possible!, you may say. And you may very well be right. I have become convinced, however, that pursuing such a course is the *only* way to address our various problems in a *comprehensive* way. Attempting to implement such a solution may, of course, result in failure—which failure could very well mean that we humans (along with many other species) would go the way of the dinosaurs. But because I can conceive of no other solution that is any more promising, I am convinced that this is the course that should be

⁴⁸³ *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*. New York: Basic Books, 2006, p. xiii.

⁴⁸⁴ See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005, p. 183.

taken. And that those who are associated with Christianity (and Judaism) should perceive as their *duty*, as religious people, to provide the necessary leadership.

Given societal system change as the chosen solution to pursue, the question arises: What sorts of actions should be engaged in? I would identify four possible courses of action:

- Create, and publicize, “catchy” slogans. After all, given that “Just say no! worked well with the drug addiction problem, there is every reason to believe that a sloganeering program would work for societal system change as well. One needs only to suggest, in a brief message, that people should work for societal system change, and they will do it.
- Develop a series of sample sermons/homilies that clergy can use as the basis for creating their own sermons/homilies, and get them to develop and deliver their sermons/homilies. Congregants, upon then hearing suggestions—even commands—that they begin engaging in activities to bring about societal system change will heed the words spoken, and immediately begin acting on them—even leaving services early so they can get started as soon as possible.
- Work to convince one’s representatives to present legislation to the legislature of which they are a member that, when acted upon, will lead to societal system change. They will listen intently to one’s ideas, will work diligently to see that appropriate legislation is introduced and passed, and corrective actions will begin before you can say “President Obama sure has introduced an awful lot of change into our society!”
- Work through private organizations—whether existing ones such as churches or clubs—or organizations created specifically for the purpose of bringing about societal system change: develop ideas, work to convince others regarding the merits of one’s ideas, and work to implement one’s ideas.

I have deliberately stated the first three suggestions in a manner to suggest that I advise against them—for I don’t believe that any of the three would lead us to “the promised land.” Meaning, then, that I would “put my eggs in the basket” of working through private organizations. Herein I focus just on churches, but there is no reason why other types of organizations could not also act on the proposal that I present herein.

Note that in advocating that members of church congregations give attention to societal system change I am not saying that they should abandon whatever efforts they are engaged in to address current needs. I *am* saying, however, that we are living during a critical period in human history, such that attention to the “long run”—which may not be as long as we would like!—also warrants our attention. Putting our heads in the sand will not produce the results needed for the future well-being—and perhaps even survival—of our grandchildren!

I would claim of my proposal that it has a firm Biblical basis, while also being “as American as apple pie.” Thus, before I present my proposal I wish first to comment on the Biblical basis for the proposal, then indicate how it fits our American tradition. That I see no contradiction between the two goes without saying. After all, private organizations such as we know them in our society—churches, environmental clubs, service clubs, etc.—did not exist during Bible

times; in part because the mentality that existing then is different from the one that exists in our society, in part because such organizations were frowned upon, even forbidden, back then.

In proposing a solution based on the use of private organizations—and specifically, or at least especially, churches—I may be accused of being a *conservative*. If by “conservative” one means that I oppose the granting of civil rights, oppose social security, oppose having a minimum wage, etc.—i.e., my stance is one of opposition to initiatives that have benefited the “average” person—I am not a “conservative.” But neither am I a “liberal,” if by that is meant one who believes that we should always look to governments for the solutions to our problems: the fact that I am proposing that we work through private organizations to bring about societal system change should prove that! Rather than being a “conservative” or a “liberal,” I am one whose values have been shaped especially through my exposure to Christianity—via attending services and reading—and living all of my life in the United States—Wisconsin especially, but also North Carolina, Maryland, Ohio, and (briefly) Oregon.

I indicated above that before presenting my proposal I wished to comment on its Biblical and American basis. Two other topics, however, need brief attention before doing that—(1) how I conceive the Good Society, and (2) what I mean by “societal system change”—the purpose of such change being to move our society in a Good Society direction, of course.

Briefly, I conceive the Good Society as a society within which certain positive personal traits are common—in part because everyday life in the society conduces such traits, in part because such traits are taught—in the conventional sense, and by example. Numerous positive personal traits could be listed here, but let me mention just a few: being kind, generous, honest, open-minded, impartial, forgiving, etc.

What, then, would the “societal system change” to which I am referring consist of? For reasons that should become clear later, I eschew here any attempts at concreteness: the *solution* that I offer in my proposal (i.e., societal system change) lacks specificity, but the *means* that I suggest—the proposal *per se*—is of a very specific nature. What I suggest, in my proposal, is a means that takes the form of a new *institution*; and what I claim is that ***individuals participating in the “operation” of that institution will acquire ideas which, when (some of them at least are) acted upon, will result in an increase in the number of people with positive personal traits, and a societal situation such that the possession of such traits will be a help, rather than a hindrance, to everyday living.*** I recognize that these “goals” are somewhat amorphous; I am convinced, however, that it is goals stated in such a way that are precisely what are needed for the “success” (assuming such to be possible) of the program that I propose herein.

I *could* make a few specific comments on institutions and other features that I would associate with the Good Society, but choose to refrain from making any such comments here so as not to bias the thinking of any participants in the institution that I will be proposing. Without further commentary, then, let me next indicate the Biblical basis that I perceive for my proposal. This will then be followed by a few comments on the “American” nature of my proposal—that, in turn being followed by a presentation of my proposal. The proposal itself involves four sections, (1) an introduction, (2) a description of the institution’s specific characteristics, (3) a list of guiding principles, and (4) a discussion of anticipated consequences resulting from implementation of the proposal.

However, because I made just a few comments—definitional ones—above on the key topic of the nature of the Good Society, and more needs to be said on the topic, the next (short) section makes a few additional comments, and a later section expands on the matter even more.

Some Characteristics of the Good Society

I will make just a few points here;⁴⁸⁵ the reader likely will be able to add others. Let me begin by noting that in driving, this past Sunday (November 15, 2009) from my son’s home in Kimberly, Wisconsin, to mine, in Greendale, Wisconsin, I noticed a billboard with a large picture of Bishop Desmond Tutu. I don’t recall the exact wording on the billboard, but *do* recall that it indicated that he favored equality. I, too, favor equality (of condition). But because I believe that if in a society the above-listed personal traits are commonplace, there will *be* virtual equality of condition. Given this belief, I see no particular need to list equality as a desirable societal attribute. Indeed, I am not convinced that a society within which there was equality, e.g., in household income would be *attainable*; or if attainable, would even be *desirable*. I would rather “shoot” for a society within which positive individual traits were prized than one wherein income equality were the order of the day.

Should the Good Society have a Department of Defense? Perhaps one would be needed in the near term—but if so, it should be a true department of *defense*. Which is to suggest—correctly I believe—that the current Department is not, and has not been for a number of decades. I have no intention here of rehearsing the offensive—yes, they *have* been offensive!—activities of the Department (to say nothing of the CIA⁴⁸⁶) over the past few decades. Suffice it to point only to the current war against Iraq as a prime example.

Were our society to become a Good Society—by, say, 2025—it might need to have the capability to defend itself—and perhaps even intervene in certain situations, as we did in Germany after Adolf Hitler rose to power. (A question, however: Had the United States and Great Britain and France had Good Societies in 1930, would conditions have existed in Germany that would have made possible Hitler’s rise? I have my doubts!) However, one would like to think that as the United States was in the process of becoming a Good Society, its citizens (and even its government) would be working to make *other* societies Good Societies as well. So that there might not need to be a Department of [True] Defense in 2025. Or if there remained such a need, the Department would not need to be very large—and would be emphasizing *non-lethal* weapons. There *are* such weapons!

Whether or not a Good Society would need a Department of [True] Defense, its members would need to recognize that “global warming” is a very real problem. As scientist James Lovelock (of “Gaia hypothesis” fame) determined a number of years ago, Earth behaves—for reasons not clearly understood—as a system. As such, it uses “negative feedback” mechanisms to maintain relative stability. However, if a system is stressed beyond a certain point—in Earth’s case by the

⁴⁸⁵ Additional points will be added in Section G.2. The orientation of the present section is somewhat different from that of F.2. in that in this section the intent is to identify characteristics of the Good Society *other than* personal attributes of its members, whereas the focus of Section G.2. is on how the behavior of participants of the institution described later might *shape* our society—whether or not intended.

⁴⁸⁶ See, e.g., William Blum’s *Killing Hope* at <http://killinghope.org>.

addition of “new” carbon (and other “greenhouse” gases) to the atmosphere—the negative feedback mechanisms may cease operating, to be replaced by positive feedback ones. That implies (in the case of Earth), a situation of “runaway”—during which change becomes rapid, until a new equilibrium is reached. NASA’s James Hansen has been warning us for years that we must address this problem—and soon—but our government does not seem to be overly inclined to heed his warnings. Even with Barack Obama as President.

I should perhaps add, for the sake of clarification, that “global warming” is somewhat of a misnomer, because the accumulation of “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere causes, *ceteris paribus*, not only a *trend* in increase in the global mean temperature, but also increased storminess, an increase in the number of severe storms, droughts (with associated fires), and increased unpredictability in the weather (with these effects *themselves* acting as causes of further problems).

Climatologists are in agreement that the primary cause of global warming is the human use of fossil fuels—using coal to create electricity, using petroleum to power automobiles and trucks (etc.), and using natural gas to heat homes. Given this fact, we need to reduce our overall use of fossil fuels, and this can be done by (a) reducing the *per capita* use (indirect as well as direct) of fossil fuels, and/or (b) working for population size stability (or even decline) rather than continued growth. The latter, of course, raises moral issues, thus is a topic upon which it would be difficult to obtain consensus—even in the Good Society; and for that reason is an avenue unlikely to be taken. Reducing the *per capita* use of fossil fuels, on the other hand, raises few, if any, moral issues, and therefore is an avenue holding much more promise. Again, there is a two-fold approach possible here, one being to (a) reduce *per capita* consumption of goods drastically so that less energy is needed in producing goods, and/or (b) develop alternate (non-polluting) sources of energy to replace fossil fuels.

Prof. John H. Bodley has stated in a recent book that as “the scale of human societies increases, at least five things are likely to happen:[⁴⁸⁷]

(1) per capita economic productivity and consumption increases, but the product become more inequitably distributed;

(2) democracy declines, because decision making becomes more cumbersome and more concentrated;

(3) institutions and technologies become more specialized, more complex, more costly, and more vulnerable;

(4) the pace of change and instability increases; and

(5) all types of social power become more concentrated.”

In short, although a “progressivist” (Bodley’s term) mentality prevails in our society—so that we tend to assume unthinkingly that growth is good, big is better, technological “progress” is inevitable, etc.—the fact of the matter that there is a trade-off that occurs as a society develops in

⁴⁸⁷ *The Power of Scale: A Global History Approach*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003, p. 66.

the conventional way: with “development” there may be various “pluses,” but will also be various “negatives”—and who is to say that the negatives aren’t more important than the “pluses”?

At any rate, one recommendation that might be made is to recognize that “scale” *does* present serious problems,⁴⁸⁸ and to address that problem by encouraging the development of small, relatively self-sufficient communities—and making them *eco*-communities so that they would simultaneously address (somewhat, at least) the “global warming” problem and those problems, identified by Prof. Bodley, that are specifically related to scale.⁴⁸⁹

A Perspective On The Bible

The Bible is—admittedly—a complex book. It contains numerous literary genres. And numerous perspectives have been expressed regarding what the Bible is “about.” For example, in a single book (!) we find these “summaries” of the Bible:⁴⁹⁰

- “It [the Bible] is the account of a faithless people and a faithful God who seek constantly to renew their relationship each with the other.”
- “If the Bible were just about the successful and the pious it would be little more than a collection of Horatio Alger tales or Barbara Cartland romances. It could aspire at best to the status of *Aesop’s Fables* or a Norse epic. What makes the Bible interesting and compelling is the company of humans beings who through its pages play their parts in the drama of the human and the divine.”
- “The Bible is an account of that great company of people who have both sought and found a way. We should take them seriously, for they have much to tell us.”
- “The Bible, if nothing else, is a book about the dangers of false trust.”
- “. . . the Bible is about the formation of a fellowship, a community of men and women who are reminded over and over again that they are not alone, not on their own but part of a communion”
- “If the Bible is about anything, it is about the subtle, ruthless, remorseless persistence of evil.”

⁴⁸⁸ See also Kirkpatrick’s huge book (!) on the virtues of smallness: *Human Scale*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980. I should also mention E. F. Schumacher’s famous *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

⁴⁸⁹ If nothing else, taking such a course would be potentially much safer than following the path of “geo-engineering”—promoted, e.g., by Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner in *Freakonomics*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 2005.

⁴⁹⁰ Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. New York: Avon Books, 1996, pp. 65, 185, 188, 191, 196, 246, 259, 267, 326, and 327.

- “[. . . the hypothetical book] *Why Good People Do Bad Things*.^[491] That is what we have been talking about all along, and it is no small subject of the Bible as well.”
- “. . . the Bible, if it is anything at all, is an essay in the genealogy of temptation.”
- “. . . the Bible . . . is a book not about limits but about infinity, and visions, not history minus but poetry plus.”
- “The Bible . . . is the record of those for whom mystery and meaning are not antithetical but a life’s work in the growing knowledge of self and of God.”

In my own personal experience I initially developed the perspective that the Bible was on the one hand a collection of stories, but also a guidebook on right living. But “right living” interpreted largely from a negative standpoint: Don’t drink, smoke, gamble, play cards, fornicate, go to movies, dance, etc. Why not? Because such behaviors all somehow resulted in violation of one’s body conceived as a temple, and the result of such violation would be an afterlife in Hell. One could, however, receive forgiveness for one’s sins, resulting in one’s “slate being wiped clean,” making one then eligible for Heaven. God, in this view of Christianity, was a sort of accountant who kept a record of one’s transgressions, but could also be petitioned for favors. If God “answered” one’s prayers, one naturally felt obligated to “testify” to that effect, and offer praises to God—perhaps by singing appropriate hymns.

Over the years, however, I have come to see the Bible from a less individualistic standpoint. I have come to recognize that an individualistic perspective on the Bible has its basis in the individualistic thinking that is pervasive in our society. It is a perspective that has been “read into”—projected onto—the Bible by certain groups of Bible readers, rather than being a perspective that is inherent in the Bible.

In fact, I have come to see the Bible as primarily having a *societal* perspective, this reflecting *God’s* orientation. I have come to see as God’s primary desire that humans live in a harmonious manner with reference to one another, and the rest of His creation. That insofar as humans have ways of life that depart from that ideal, this is due to *human* actions—although some individuals bear more responsibility for this situation than others. God, however, is not pleased with the fact that societies have developed within which harmony does not exist—within which, e.g., violence, poverty, homelessness, addictive behaviors, etc. exist. And God has therefore given rules to humans which, if followed by all in the society (and especially those most gifted/”blessed”), would result in restoration of the harmony that once existed.⁴⁹² If societies are to be re-made, they will need to be re-made via *human* activity. God is, however, willing to

⁴⁹¹The allusion here is, of course, to Rabbi Harold Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

⁴⁹² See, for example, Jared Diamond, “The Worst Mistake in The History of the Human Race.” This was published in the May 1987 issue of *Discover* magazine, but is available at:
http://www.environnement.ens.fr/perso/claessen/agriculture/mistake_jared_diamond.pdf

provide guidance (via the Holy Spirit) in this re-making—but expects that guidance to be *sought*, not just granted on a random basis.⁴⁹³

A final point relative to my perspective on the Bible is that I perceive it as being a record of a certain Tradition. I perceive that Tradition as being basically “about” human well-being, with God’s involvement relative to human welfare (*general* welfare) being basically to issue rules to follow—rules that, if followed by most members of a society, would result in a general situation of well-being. In being a record of a Tradition, it is a book to be studied and pondered—but is *not* a book merely to be put on a shelf. Rather than thinking of the Tradition in question as having ended with “Bible times,” one is to think of oneself as a *part* of that Tradition; one is to *join* the Tradition, not just admire it from afar. Indeed, cannot Jesus’s statement in John’s gospel that he was leaving us with a Helper be interpreted as giving us *Biblical* permission to ignore the Bible in favor of this Helper?!!

Given this general perspective on the Bible, what is the Biblical basis that I would provide for that perspective? In identifying and commenting upon the specifics of what I conceive of as the Biblical Tradition it is useful to begin with what would appear to be the earliest version of the Ten Commandments found in the Bible. What I am referring to here is the version that appears in Exodus 34:12 - 26 (identified in Exodus 34:28 thusly: “. . . the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments,” and preceded in v. 11 with these words: “Obey the laws that I am giving you [Moses directly] today. I will drive out the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, as you advance [toward the Promised Land].”⁴⁹⁴):

1. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country into which you are going: this could be a fatal trap for you.
2. Tear down their altars, destroy their sacred pillars, and cut down their symbols of the goddess Asherah.
3. Do not worship any other god [for there *are* other gods].
4. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country [you are about to enter].
5. Do not make gods of metal and worship them.
6. Keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread.
7. Every first-born son and first-born domestic animal belongs to me.
8. No one is to appear before me without an offering.
9. Do not work on the seventh day, not even during plowing time or harvest.
10. Keep the Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters.

⁴⁹³ Which is not to say that there aren’t exceptions!

⁴⁹⁴ All Biblical quotations herein are from my *Good News Bible*, dated 1976.

11. Three times a year all of your men must come to worship me.
12. Do not offer bread made with yeast when you sacrifice an animal to me.
13. Do not keep until the following morning any part of the animal killed at the Passover Festival.
14. Each year bring to the house of the LORD the first grain that you harvest.
15. Do not cook a young sheep or goat in its mother's milk.

Note here first that there are 14 “commandments” rather than 10 (given that 1 and 4 are virtually identical). And note, second, that although they are referred to as “commandments,” they are all better referred to as *regulations*,⁴⁹⁵ with none of them being *laws* (in contrast, in the version of the Ten Commandments⁴⁹⁶ given in Exodus 20:1 - 17, where 6 of the 10 are laws.)

Note also (the non-obvious—and also rather embarrassing—point) that to attribute commands to God is to perceive (if but implicitly) God as a *king-like being*. An important implication of *that* fact is that one thereby “admits” that God cannot *cause* people to engage (or refrain from engaging) in certain behaviors, but can only *order* them to. That is, God is implicitly presented as not *omnipotent* (a Greek concept, and therefore one foreign to the Bible); and in not being omnipotent, God does not, then, have the *ability* to create the cosmos and its components! So that the God who, in Genesis, creates the cosmos *cannot* be the same God who in, e.g., Deuteronomy, issues commands. It is true that the Bible contains evidence that the *henotheism* (i.e., the idea that gods are only tribal gods) of the early Hebrews gave way to *monotheism* (i.e., the idea that there is but *one* true God); there is, however, no need to resolve *those* two views of God because they are not in serious conflict).

The Bible does not, however, resolve the contradiction identified here regarding the *nature* of God—and has the Law-giving God somehow (without explanation) also be the Creator God. In a sense, the Bible “resolves” (or at least has been so interpreted) the conflict by making the claim that God created humans with “free will,” and therefore able to choose either good or evil. But this assertion—and its associated “explanation”—amounts to a “shifty sophistication”⁴⁹⁷ in that it

⁴⁹⁵Most of which are cultic in nature; laws, in contrast, can be thought of as commands having an ethical content.

⁴⁹⁶I find it interesting that many professing Christians place great stock in the Ten Commandments, not realizing, seemingly, that in a very real sense Paul's letters (his discussion of the Holy Spirit in particular) make those Commandments passé. For an interesting (if old) discussion of the Ten Commandments see “History and the Commandments” in (pp. 271 - 75) Louis Wallis, *The Bible is Human*. New York: AMS Press; a reprint of the 1942 edition published by Columbia University Press.

⁴⁹⁷A phrase derived from this sentence: “. . . the courts, standing on a secure and familiar natural-rights footing, have commonly made short work of the shifty sophistications which trade-union advocates have offered for their consideration.” Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, Publishers, 1973, p. 329. With prefatory note by Joseph Dorfman, and a review by James Hayden Tufts. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1904. This book is, along with most of Veblen's other books, available online at <http://de.geocities.com/veblenite>.

raises the question: If God had the ability to give humans free will, how is it that subsequently He lacked an ability to *withdraw* that “gift”—and then intervene in human affairs? And if He has continued to reveal truths to people (a type of intervention), how is *that* consistent with His decision not to intervene in a more direct way? Etc.

But these are *theological* issues that need not detain us here; besides, I lack talent in the field of intellectual contortionism! Let us get back to the matter at hand, and allow the theologians to wallow in their speculations regarding these esoteric matters—while there is still paid employment available to them!

To return to this “primitive” version of the “Ten Commandments”: Why their lack of ethical content? What I would hypothesize as the answer is that this version was created at a time in Hebrew history when the tribes were small enough to be extended families. As such, sharing would have occurred as a *matter of course*; and as a consequence, there would have been no *need* for ethical laws.⁴⁹⁸ That is, *mores*—unwritten “laws”—existed in the society such that when neediness was observed, that neediness was automatically “ministered to” by fellow tribal members able so to do (and this was done largely because humans, *qua* humans, are so “programmed.”⁴⁹⁹). Because the mores of the tribe “prescribed” much of their behavior, members of the tribe had no need for laws as *we* know them (i.e., written rules of an ostensibly ethical nature). As tribes expanded in size, however, not only did a breakdown of the mores occur; with their breakdown, people began to *neglect* those of their fellows with physical needs. Indeed, there even began the *exploitation*⁵⁰⁰ of one’s fellows—thereby adding to whatever neediness already existed.⁵⁰¹ Because some of those with memories of the “old days” perceived (or was revelation involved here?) that their society was “going downhill,” they took matters into their own hands and initiated the Tradition. That is, they created a series of laws (these being subjected to editing over a long period of time), and attributed them to “God” to give them

⁴⁹⁸For an excellent discussion of tribal societies see David Maybury-Lewis, *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*. New York: Viking, 1992. A more comprehensive, if less sophisticated (and recent), book is Robin Clarke and Geoffrey Hindley, *The Challenge of the Primitives*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975. For an excellent “tribal” critique of American society see Kent Nerburn, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads With an Indian Elder*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1994.

⁴⁹⁹ An argument could be made to this effect, but this is not the place to make it.

⁵⁰⁰Yes, Mr. Marx, exploitation didn’t begin with Capitalism. It just became more subtle. See, e.g., Chapter V (“*Das Kapital*,” pp. 91 - 129) in Michael Harrington, *Socialism*. New York: Bantam Books, 1973. Originally published by Saturday Review Press in 1972.

⁵⁰¹It is interesting to read I Samuel 8, wherein the “leaders of Israel” told Samuel that he was getting old, so that he should “appoint a king to rule over us” Samuel was displeased with this request, and in praying to the LORD was told “I am the one they have rejected as their king.” The LORD then told Samuel to “listen to them, but give them strict warnings and explain how their kings will treat them.” Samuel then took the LORD’s advice, and proceeded to list all of the disadvantages of having a king—e.g., “He will take a tenth of your flocks. And you yourselves will become his slaves.” But the people “paid no attention to Samuel, but said ‘No! We want a king, so that we will be like other nations, with our own king to rule us and lead us out to war and to fight our battles.’” What’s interesting here is that the writer/editor—writing long after the events “reported”—knew that exploitation had begun in Hebrew society especially after the rise of the kingship institution, so that the “warnings—or predictions—attributed here to Samuel were actually historical facts.

force—so that the laws would be followed (they hoped—vainly, as it turns out). Thus, the contribution of these initiators of the Tradition was not only to create ethical laws, but attribute them to God.⁵⁰²

Why view the commands listed above as antecedent to the birth of the Tradition, given that they utterly lack in ethical content—i.e., are not in the least oriented to human well-being? Because *they represent an attempt to influence the behavior of their fellows, and were attributed to God* (as if God were a king-like Being⁵⁰³). In fact, one can argue that the *reason* they were attributed to God was the hope (if but unconscious), on the part of those who created the commands, that such an attribution would lend force to the commands—would, i.e., *motivate* people to follow the commands. When, later, laws of an *ethical* nature appeared on the scene, there was precedent for stating them as commands issued by God—with, again, the reason (probably not recognized consciously by those involved) for so doing being to motivate their fellows to follow the commands.

The ethical laws/commands that *did* develop in Hebrew society can be classified as follows. (Indeed, let me add at this point that, in my opinion, these ethical laws form the very heart of the Law—a point that I will defend later in this section.) Note that although the commands of the familiar version of the Ten Commandments were directed at *all* Hebrews, the following are directed specifically at the society's "haves"—and have their basis in the fact that neediness existed in the society. In addition, it is important to note that a tacit assumption underlying these laws is that the needy were in that state through no fault of their own: they were needy because they were widows, their husbands having been killed in battle; they were needy because they were orphans, their parents having been killed; they were needy because they were poor, this resulting from bad weather or an army stealing their crops/animals; strangers might very well be needy for the simple reason that they were away from home; etc. (We moderns need to keep this fact in mind, because it does not follow that because the needy in ancient Hebrew society were needy through no fault of their own, that that is necessarily true in *our* society today. However, given our tendency—as "good Christians"—to "blame the victim"—for his laziness,⁵⁰⁴ bad habits, etc.—we moderns need to avoid our tendency to "blame the victim" in knee-jerk fashion, without any analysis of *why* someone is needy.)

(The "ameliorative" laws referred to below are ones that are oriented to existing situations; "restorative" ones, in contrast, have as their intention the restoration of a previously-existing situation. The actions demanded of commands can be either direct or indirect, and also may be either injunctions—i.e., commands to *do* something—or prohibitions—i.e., commands to *not* do something. Finally, commands can be thought of as varying in their degree of specificity—

⁵⁰²Note here that I am not denying the existence of God, but am only denying that the laws being referred to here were literally given to the early Hebrews by God. Which is *not* to say, however, that revelation may not have been involved with them. Regarding this latter point, I would add that we *cannot* know with any degree of certainty one way or the other.

⁵⁰³Indeed, it appears that this attribution of commands to God occurred some time *after* the rise of the kingship institution, and that the king was used as the model for God (henotheism first, then monotheism).

⁵⁰⁴"Laziness" is one of those words in our language that simultaneously describes (perhaps with accuracy) and explains (wrongly, usually).

although it is not always easy to decide *where*, on the specific-abstract continuum, one should place a given command.)

I. Ameliorative

A. Direct

1. Injunctions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

2. Prohibitions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

B. Indirect (all of which are specific)

1. Injunctions

2. Prohibitions

II. Restorative

A. Abstract

B. Specific.

Let us next, then, identify specific laws under the above headings:

1. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:9 - If a man buys a female slave for his son, he is to treat her like a daughter. (From our perspective today this is an abstract injunction, but in the context of ancient Hebrew society—a “high context” society⁵⁰⁵—would not have been.)
- b. Leviticus 19:18 – Don’t take revenge, or hate; love your neighbor as you love yourself.
- c. Leviticus 19:32 - Respect the elderly [again, a law that would have had a more concrete meaning in ancient Israel than it has for us].

⁵⁰⁵I believe that the concept of “high context” societies and “low context” ones was introduced by Ronald Simkins.

- d. Leviticus 25:35 - You must provide for a poor neighbor.
- e. Deuteronomy 5:16 - Respect your parents [also a law that would have had a more specific meaning for the ancient Hebrews].
- f. Deuteronomy 10:19 - Show love for foreigners—because *you* were once foreigners [i.e., in captivity in Egypt].

2. Specific Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:10 - If a man takes a second wife, he must continue to give the first wife the same amount of food and clothing, and the same rights.
- b. Exodus 22:26 - If you take a cloak as a pledge, give it back in the evening [for I am merciful, God says in the next verse].
- c. Deuteronomy 15:7 - 9 - If a fellow Israelite is in need, don't be selfish; lend [don't give!] him as much as he needs.
- d. Deuteronomy 24:15 - Before sundown, pay the wages of those to whom you owe wages.

3. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 22:21 – Don't mistreat foreigners.
- b. Exodus 22:22 – Don't mistreat widows or orphans.
- c. Exodus 23:9 – Don't mistreat foreigners; you know how it *feels* to be one.
- d. Leviticus 19:33 – Don't mistreat foreigners, for you were once foreigners.
- e. Leviticus 25:46 – Don't treat you fellow Israelites harshly.

4. Specific Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 20:1 - 17 - The Ten Commandments. [Most of these can be considered as rather specific in nature: don't murder, commit adultery, steal, accuse others falsely, desire another man's house/wife/slaves, etc.]
- b. Exodus 21:20 – Don't kill a slave or you will be punished [*how* not being specified].
- c. Exodus 22:25 – Don't require interest in loaning to a poor man.
- d. Exodus 23:6 – Don't deny justice to a poor man [i.e., be even-handed].
- e. Leviticus 19:13 – Don't take advantage of [i.e., exploit] anyone, don't rob anyone, don't hold back anyone's wages.

- f. Leviticus 19:14 – Don’t curse a deaf man, or cause a blind man to stumble.
 - g. Leviticus 25:37 – Don’t charge a poor neighbor any interest; don’t make a profit from the food you sell him.
 - h. Deuteronomy 5:7 - 21 [The Ten Commandments are repeated here, in a version very close to the Exodus 20 version.]
 - i. Deuteronomy 23:19 - In loaning to a fellow Israelite, charge no interest.
5. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Injunctions (an interesting category!—in that there are more ethical laws in this category than in any other one)
- a. Exodus 16:23 - The seventh day is to be a day of rest, dedicated to the LORD. [John Dominic Crossan has made this brilliant comment regarding the significance of the “sabbath” day: “The sabbath day represents a temporary stay of inequality, a day of rest for everyone alike, for animals and humans, for slaves and owners, for children and adults. Why? Because that is how God sees the world. Sabbath rest sends all alike back to symbolic egalitarianism. It is a regular stay against the activity that engenders inequality on the other days of the week.”⁵⁰⁶]
 - b. Exodus 23:11 - On each seventh year let the land rest, but the poor may eat whatever grows on it during that year.
 - c. Leviticus 19:9, 10 - In harvesting, leave the grain at the edges of the field for the poor; and leave the grapes in the vineyard that were missed for the poor and foreigners. [The law of *gleaning*.]
 - d. Leviticus 23:22 [The gleaning of grain is referred to again.]
 - e. Leviticus 23:42 - During the Festival of Shelters everyone is to live in temporary shelters for seven days. [What Crossan says regarding the sabbath day—see above—would also seem to be applicable here in that some *temporary* leveling would be involved, and this might help to renew feelings of empathy on the part of “haves” relative to the “have nots,” and other needy people, in their midst. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the wording here for verses 42 and 43 is: “All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants may know that the LORD made the people live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the LORD your God.”]
 - f. Leviticus 25:4 - 6 - Let your land rest every seventh year. But even though it is not cultivated, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, foreigners, and domestic/wild animals [but not the poor?!].

⁵⁰⁶*The Birth of Christianity*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, p. 189.

- g. Deuteronomy 5:12 - 14 - Observe the Sabbath; this includes foreigners in your midst, and slaves.
 - h. Deuteronomy 14:22 - 29 - [The law of the tithe (so often misrepresented—and utterly so—by the churches!)] Each year take a tenth of your production and celebrate with it; however, on each *third* year the tithe is to go to [what we today would call “food pantries”] for Levites [who have no property], foreigners, orphans, and widows.
 - i. Deuteronomy 23:24 - In walking on a path in someone’s vineyard you can eat grapes along the way, but are not permitted to take any away in a container.
 - j. Deuteronomy 23:25 - In walking on a path in someone’s grain field, you can eat the grain that you can pull off with your hands, but don’t cut any with a sickle [or carry any away in a container?].
 - k. Deuteronomy 24:19 - 21 - After gathering your crops, leave what’s left for foreigners, widows, and orphans. The same for your olive orchards and grape vineyards.
 - l. Deuteronomy 26:12 - Every third year give the tithe to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows.
6. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Prohibitions
- a. Leviticus 25:23 - Land cannot be permanently sold, because it belongs to God.
7. Abstract Restorative Laws
- a. Leviticus 19:18 - Love your neighbor as yourself [a law that should be followed not only in the here-and-now, but in a fashion that restores a situation wherein neediness should not occur, or occur but rarely].
8. Specific Restorative Laws
- a. Exodus 21:2 - All Hebrew slaves are to be set free in the seventh year.
 - b. Leviticus 25:10 - 12 - The fiftieth year [referred to as the Jubilee year] is to be set apart. All property that has been sold is to be restored to the original owner or his descendants; all slaves are to be returned to their families.
 - c. Deuteronomy 15:1 - At the end of each seventh year, cancel the debts of all those who owe you money [except for foreigners, verse 3 adds!].⁵⁰⁷

We have, then, here an amazing set of laws, created for an agricultural society within which relatively little (on a per capita basis) long-distance trade occurred. This fact needs to be pointed

⁵⁰⁷ See Michael Hudson, *The Lost Tradition of Biblical Debt Cancellations*, available at: <http://michael-hudson.com/articles/debt/Hudson.LostTradition.pdf>

out, because it is clear that the laws are not meant to be applied in an urban-industrial society such as the one we are living in at present. Still, they are of interest to us moderns because they demonstrate that a relatively simple society is capable of creating a rather sophisticated—and thoughtfully humane—set of laws. What I find of particular interest is the laws that specify *indirect* actions to help those in need. There is recognition here that few want “handouts,” because their dignity as human beings is affected adversely in accepting handouts. Therefore, those who created this set of laws had the sensitivity—the genius!—to create laws that enabled the needy to receive help while maintaining their dignity. This is not to say that outright giving is not commanded in these laws, but the inclusion of the various injunctions for helping others in indirect ways seems to suggest to those to whom they are directed (i.e., “haves”) that in helping others they give consideration not only to the *physical* needs of others, but the *psychological* need on the part of recipients for retaining their sense of dignity. What wisdom!

What’s interesting about the ethical laws presented in the Pentateuch is not just the laws themselves, but the *tactics* used by the writers to *motivate* people to follow those laws (another contribution to the Tradition on the part of the early Hebrews). For example, consider the following familiar—and beautiful—passage:

Israel [said Moses], remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands [from God] that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4 - 9)

The writer in this case is using what might be termed a “reminder” strategy, advising his fellows to do various things to remind him of the laws (*all* of them, not just the ethical ones)—in the hope that they will then *follow* the laws (i.e., commands that they have attributed to God).

Three additional such tactics can be identified:

- Attempts to generate feelings of empathy for the needy in one’s society.
- Promises for obedience.
- Threats for *disobedience*.

Let us briefly address each in turn, for these, too, represent contributions to the Tradition—and as such are pertinent to the Bible’s treatment of worship.

1. Feelings of Empathy

- a. The Hebrews are frequently reminded in the Pentateuch that they were slaves in Egypt,⁵⁰⁸ and that the LORD had delivered them from that slavery. For example, in Deuteronomy 24:21, 22 we find these words: “When you have gathered your grapes, do not go back

⁵⁰⁸ Whether they actually *had* been—most archeologists seem to think not—is not an issue of concern here.

over the vines a second time; the grapes that are left are for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Never forget that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I have given you this command.”

This reminder seems to have two functions. First, by reminding the Hebrews that they (or their ancestors) had been (supposedly) slaves, the expectation was that they would feel empathy for slaves and other “have nots.” In fact in Exodus 23:9, we find: “Do not mistreat a foreigner; you know how it *feels* to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.” (italics added) Second, by reminding the Hebrews that God had (allegedly) delivered them from slavery, an implicit contract (“covenant”) is being stated: “I have done for you (have delivered you from slavery), now it’s your turn to do for me—and what I want you to do is obey my laws.”⁵⁰⁹

- b. Institution of the Sabbath day, by giving everyone (including animals!) a day of rest, is an equalizer (if but temporary). Besides that, it gives “haves” a time to reflect on how they treat others relative to what God wants—so that they can resolve to do better during the upcoming week.
- c. The Festival of Booths is also not only a (temporary) leveler, but a period of time that brings “haves” and “have nots” together. This, along with the fact that it gives “haves” a fairly lengthy time to reflect on how they treat others, may cause “haves” to improve their relationships with their less fortunate fellows. [I use the term “less fortunate” deliberately here because the Bible’s dominant perspective on societal position seems to be that if one is a “have not,” this is not because one is lazy, etc., but, rather, because one either is being exploited by a fellow Hebrew, or has simply had bad luck. Indeed, the Hebrew Scripture’s explanation for why poverty exists in a society seems to be: “Haves” are ignoring God’s laws! How different is the attitude in our society!—in which instead of blaming “haves” for the existence of poverty (neediness in general), we “blame the victim”—and thoughtlessly at that.]
- c. The Passover festival might also be mentioned under the “empathy” heading, especially given that it is specifically a “remembrance” festival that commemorates God’s (alleged) deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. As one of the three “pilgrim festivals—the other two being Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shuvuot (Pentecost)—it would have resulted in people traveling to Jerusalem. Given that this would have resulted in contact with fellow Jews in other than “economic” (and other neediness situations—e.g., the lame) circumstances, these three festivals may have been designed (if but unconsciously),

⁵⁰⁹Perhaps this can be regarded as the initial version of the covenant concept. Preceding such a command, however, is, e.g., this one: “Do not spread lies about anyone, and when someone is on trial for life, speak out if your testimony can help him. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:16) A covenant is a sort of contract between God and humans—but one “written” and imposed by God! In this case we simply have a command of God: “Do such and such simply because I am ordering you to do it.” A covenant involves both God and humans, with the earliest true covenant in the Bible taking the form, “I delivered you from slavery in Egypt, now it’s your turn to do something for me (i.e., obey the laws that I have given you). Later, the covenant took on a new form: “Do for me (i.e., follow my laws), and I will bless you (as a people).

in part, to induce feelings of empathy in the society's "haves" for those less fortunate than themselves.

2. Promises for Obedience, Threats for Disobedience

There is a famous passage in Deuteronomy (11:26 - 28) that reads: "Today I [the LORD] am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before." What should be noticed in this passage is that the LORD is not addressing Hebrews as *individuals* but as a *collective*. In Jesus's time the Law was being given an individualistic interpretation, but centuries earlier that was by no means the case: the Pentateuch has the Law being given to a *people*, and the blessings promised for obedience and curses threatened for disobedience are also directed at a *people*.

Thus, the *promises* given in Leviticus 26:3-6 are directed at the Hebrews as a *people*: "If you [as a people] live according to my laws and obey my commands, I will send you rain at the right time, so that the land will produce crops and the trees will bear fruit. Your crops will be so plentiful that you will still be harvesting grain when it is time to pick grapes, and you will still be picking grapes when it is time to plant grain. You will have all that you want to eat, and you can live in safety in your land. I will give you peace in your land, and you can sleep without being afraid of anyone. I will get rid of the dangerous animals in the land, and there will be no more war there." Likewise, the punishments for disobedience are to be borne by the group, and are essentially the converse of the blessings for obedience. (See, e.g., the passage in Leviticus 26 that begins with verse 14.)

Note here the important point that although the ethical laws listed above are *implicitly* directed at the society's "haves," they are *explicitly* directed at the Hebrews as a *people*. Thus, the society's "have nots" are not made to feel that they are somehow people of a lesser sort—so that again, psychological considerations were involved in how the laws were stated (even though the intentions were different). (Unfortunately, this fact that the laws were *seemingly* directed at the Hebrews in general became misused; for as thinking, at a later point, became more individualistic, "haves" began turning these laws, and specifically the covenant concept, on its head—a point given more attention shortly, in discussing Jesus's contribution to the Tradition.)

Interestingly, although the *promises* in the Pentateuch for obedience to the Law are directed at the group, and not individuals, such is not the case regarding *punishments* for disobedience. Many such punishments are intended for *individuals* who violate certain specific laws. For example, a number of such cases are given in Exodus 20, including this one (v. 14): "If a man marries a woman and her mother, all three shall be burned to death because of the disgraceful thing they have done; such a thing must not be permitted among you." In cases where the violator is *not* condemned to death, there may be punishment combined with the requirement of an offering of a sacrifice. This is not to say that all of the sacrifices (using that term generically) discussed in, e.g., Leviticus have the purpose of atoning for wrongful behavior (e.g., fellowship offerings were for a different purpose⁵¹⁰), but the *principal* purpose of sacrifices appears to be

⁵¹⁰Indeed, it seems to be generally true that *sacrifices* are for atoning for sins committed, *offerings* (a special type of sacrifice) serve some other purpose.

atonement for sins committed—restoring the harmony that had existed prior to the “tearing of the societal fabric” associated with law-breaking.

A few pages earlier I suggested that ethical laws (and specifically ones other than those in the Ten Commandments) are the “heart” of the Law. I have just completed a review of the ethical laws, but given that the Pentateuch contains many laws other than ethical ones, what is my basis for asserting that the *ethical* laws are the principal ones? What I would point to in response is that in Deuteronomy 15:4, 5 we find: “Not one of your people will be poor if you obey him [God] and carefully observe everything that I [Moses] command you today.” Note that we have a *promise* here, but it is one that is different from other promises in the Old Testament. It makes no reference to blessings that will be received by the Hebrews as a people if they obey God’s commands, nor does it appeal to self-interest on the part of the society’s “haves.” It doesn’t even try to convince people to obey God’s commands because it is their turn to do for God (God having done for them, by liberating them from their Egyptian captors). Nor does it try to induce feelings of empathy for the poor in the society’s “haves.” A very unusual—and interesting—statement in Deuteronomy, then!

The “promise” here, note, is simply an off-hand—and ostensibly unimportant—commentary on what the *societal situation* will be like if God’s laws are followed. Not just the ethical laws, mind you, but *all* of them. But take notice: The clear suggestion here is that ***the writers of these five books had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent.*** John Dominic Crossan would have us believe (as I noted earlier) that these writers wanted the creation of a radically egalitarian society, but I see that claim as *overstating* the Bible writers’ intentions. Rather, I believe that a more reasonable conclusion is that they wished to restore a situation within which physical neediness would be absent. (They were, I might add, writing so as to give the *impression* that they were writing while the Hebrews were living in Palestine under the institution of kingship.)

One might argue, I suppose, that they were “reaching” for the “utopian” situation described briefly at several points in the Old Testament. The “utopia” that I am referring to here is first presented (albeit negatively) in Deuteronomy 28:30: “You will build a house—but never live in it. You will plant a vineyard—but never eat its grapes.” We find that utopian situation stated positively, however, in Isaiah 65:21, 22: “People will build houses and get to live in them—they will not be used by someone else. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the wine—It will not be drunk by others.” And in Jeremiah 31:4, 5: “Once again I will rebuild you. Once again you will take up your tambourines and dance joyfully. Once again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria, and those who plant them will eat what the vineyards produce.”

But such a utopia would be a rather strange one, from a Biblical standpoint, for two reasons. First, because it makes no reference to the presence of priests, one must assume that it *has* no priests! Why? Because there is no *need* for them, given that no one would be sinning in such a society, one would assume. Second, this utopia has no need for the love command (except with reference to child care?), because no physical neediness exists in the society. Given these features, and my assumption that the writers of the Bible were wise enough to recognize that

there will always be poor people,⁵¹¹ orphans, and widows in the society, it seems to me that they believed that what should be strived for is not a perfect society, but the minimization of physical neediness. This is not to say that they did not favor societal system change: certainly the restorative laws that they developed had precisely that intent—and note that their strategy for bringing about societal system change was the institution of certain (restorative) laws. It is impossible to believe, however, that these writers believed that a perfectly egalitarian society *could* be created: by no means were they fools! Still, the presentation of these (exceedingly brief!) utopian discussions in the Old Testament must be regarded as a contribution to the Tradition, for they “authorize” us moderns to not only critique our society, but develop our own visions of the Good Society (a sort of activity that was rather common during the nineteenth century⁵¹²), and generate ideas as to “how to get there.”

Note that to say that there are *poor* people in a society is not the same thing as saying that there are *needy* people in that society. A “poor” person in an agricultural society can be thought of as one who does not *produce* enough for a comfortable life, for whatever reasons. *That* fact, however, does not mean that that person must therefore *consume* little. For if the little that he produces is *supplemented* with, e.g., food that is supplied (directly and indirectly) to him by others, he will still be a “poor” person—but will no longer be a *needy* one. Thus, there is no warrant whatsoever for Christians (or others) to interpret this passage in a way that justifies their refusal to do anything for the needy: rather than justifying apathy, acquiescence, this passage demands *action*!

A few paragraphs earlier I reached the conclusion that the writers of these five books (constituting the Pentateuch) had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent. This conclusion leads us another conclusion, one that is as surprising as it is important. In fact, the importance of this conclusion cannot be overstated. It is: **If it can be said that the Law had a *purpose*, this means that the various laws constituting the Law can—and should—be thought of not as *ends*, but as (mere) *means*.** This is a “bombshell” of a conclusion, of course, because it means that those—whether Christians or Jews—who have a fixation on the Law are, in effect, treating the Law as an idol!! (See, e.g., Deuteronomy 5:9.) They are failing to comprehend that there is a *goal* underlying the Law, that goal being the absence of physical neediness in the society.⁵¹³

Once one reaches this level of understanding, one can consider the question: Is there but *one* means to achieve a situation of “un-neediness”? Is the creation and promulgation of laws the

⁵¹¹In fact, in Deuteronomy 15:11 we read: “There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them.” Note the “and so” here: “Address the neediness of others for the simple reason that it exists, and you can do something about it; don’t expect any reward for doing it, just do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

⁵¹²See, e.g., Frank E. Manuel, editor, *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

⁵¹³I am not, of course, saying here that a society should not establish certain rules, officers to apprehend rule-violators, courts to try the accused, and jails to punish the convicted (and/or programs to rehabilitate them). I *am* saying, however, that the legitimate *end* of laws is that of helping to minimize neediness in the society. Unfortunately, typically the elite of a society establish laws that they believe will further *their* interests, without any thought whatsoever to the existence of neediness in the society.

only path to that sort of situation? Paul would add that there is more to it than that (as we shall see shortly). And the “utopia” discussion of a few paragraphs back suggests another means entirely: Work not to create/promulgate laws but, rather, work to bring about *societal system change* (under the assumption that law-generation will not achieve that end⁵¹⁴). Indeed, the reason I place Charles Fourier⁵¹⁵ in the Tradition is not because he was a notably “spiritual” person but, rather, because he proposed the creation of “phalanxes”⁵¹⁶—i.e., small, rather self-sufficient communities—as (what might be termed) “building blocks” of a new society. That is, Fourier proposed an *institutional* solution to the problem. Which is not to say, however, that the Bible fails to present such solutions. For what is the law of the tithe if not an institution? A different sort of institution than the one proposed by Fourier, true, but an institution nonetheless.

Once we come to understand the laws of the Old Testament as *means* rather than ends, we are in an intellectual position to make at least six further conclusions:

- Laws that appear in the Bible should not be embraced merely because of that fact. Rather, one should recognize that some of those laws tend to contribute to the end that I have identified here (i.e., minimal physical neediness), some do not. The former should be heeded, the latter should be ignored—the underlying principle here being that rules that are appropriate for one society at a given time may not be for another at another time.
- Laws *other* than those appearing in the Bible may be relevant for us today. After all, our urban-industrial society has little in common with the sort of society that existed in Bible times.⁵¹⁷
- Means other than laws may be relevant for achieving the end. For example, working for societal system change (a topic that was very much “on the table” in the United States during the nineteenth century⁵¹⁸) may be a better way to occupy one’s mind and time than working to implement rules (including working to implement governmental programs). Granted that the restorative” laws of the Pentateuch obviously had as their intention bringing about societal system change; it does not follow, however, that those of us desiring today to bring about such change should think of law-generation as the appropriate path to such change.
- Although the focus of the Pentateuch seems to be on addressing physical needs, there is

⁵¹⁴Actually, it would not be an end but, rather, a *means* to the end—of well-being, a lack of neediness.

⁵¹⁵See, e.g., Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

⁵¹⁶Ripon, Wisconsin (which claims to be the birthplace of the Republican Party) began as a Fourier “phalanx” named Ceresco.

⁵¹⁷See, e.g., Edward Alsworth Ross, *Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973 (with Introduction to the Torchbook Edition by Julius Weinberg). Originally published by Houghton, Mifflin and Company in 1907.

⁵¹⁸In the form of “utopian” novels, for example, such as Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*.

no reason why we should limit ourselves to such needs. Indeed, I will argue shortly that a notable part of Jesus's contribution was that he was sensitive to the psychological and spiritual needs of others. Not that such sensitivity is not also present in the Pentateuch as well, however: As I argued in discussing laws which involve helping others in an indirect way, one can assume that behind such laws was (tacit) recognition that people have self-esteem needs which must not be violated; there is a certain dignity in being human, and to impact that negatively is to commit a serious sin.

- The end of well-being need not be thought of just in terms of humans; there is no reason why animals cannot be included. Indeed, I would even assert that, e.g., geological features should be included—such as Devil's Tower in Wyoming, drumlins in Wisconsin, etc.—the idea here being that given that we humans developed “in nature,”⁵¹⁹ we have a need for nature to be maintained, not desecrated.
- The end of reducing neediness itself can—and should—be challenged. That is, rather than thinking *just* in terms of working to reduce neediness (in all of its manifestations) in this world, we should recognize that today humans (and other animals) face a unique problem—the possibility that of the numerous (perhaps about 60%) species likely to be extinct by the end of this century, humans will be among them! Therefore, we should recognize that people (and other animals) can have well-being only if they *exist* (!), and should take “global warming” seriously, and work to address that problem with the seriousness that it deserves. Besides, it is well to keep in mind that “global warming” is not only a future threat to many species (including our own), but in the here-and-now is causing problems especially for the poor of our world.⁵²⁰ One reason, indeed, why I advocate the creation of a new sort of institution is that I see it as a possible vehicle for finding answers to this problem—answers that will be acted upon with intelligence and energy.

Thus, perceiving the laws of the Pentateuch as “mere” means—with not all of them even relevant for the end involved, and there being other (indeed *better*) means—is very liberating intellectually. Would that the Christians in our midst who are so fixated on, e.g., the Ten Commandments that they want them on public display everywhere would come to realize how misguided their viewpoint is. How lacking in true understanding of the Bible they are—to the extent that they sin by making an idol of the Ten Commandments!

⁵¹⁹See, e.g., Paul Shepard, *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973; and also his posthumously-published (Paul died in 1996) *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998. I might add that an implication of the fact that we developed “in nature” suggests that we developed with certain “design specifications”—such that if we are not able to live in accord with those “specs,” we will not be able to attain a satisfactory level of well-being. The article by Jared Diamond referred to earlier hints at this possibility. Another work of importance here is S. Boyd Eaton, Marjorie Shostak, and Melvin Konner, *The Paleolithic Prescription*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988. See in particular their list of 39 “research consensus” finding in Table XX, pp. 279-83.

⁵²⁰See, e.g., Dr. J. Matthew Sleeth's website, www.servegodsavetheplanet.org.

The end that I have identified above is *implicitly present* in the Pentateuch, but one needs to *study* the Pentateuch carefully before this end becomes obvious. Is it present elsewhere in the Old Testament? Yes, it is present many places elsewhere, but I would like to conclude my discussion here of the “Old Testament” (i.e., Hebrew Bible) by referring to just a few passages in “prophetic” books that support my thesis. First, in Hosea 6:5, 6 we find: “What I [God] want from you is plain and clear. I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices.” How does one love God? One loves God by obeying his commands—or, more generally, by doing his will. What is that? To work for, e.g., a situation within which there is no neediness of any type (and, I might add, a situation wherein people are able to live in accord with their “design specifications”). Note that one way of perceiving this passage in Hosea is to regard it as Hosea’s summary, if not restatement, of the Law! So that “Hosea’s Law” contains just the law of loving God, and what *that* involves is doing God’s will—which is to work to eliminate neediness (such work being a form of worship).

Amos expressed much the same point of view. In Amos 5:21 - 24 we find: “The LORD says, ‘I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them: I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.’” What beautiful language! And what wonderful content!—that what God wants is that you treat your fellows well. We must keep in mind here, of course, that the “justice” that Amos was referring to was not the *legalistic* sort of justice that *we* think about, but justice in the sense of people getting what they deserve. And what is it that they deserve? They deserve to have their various needs met; thus, those of you whose needs *are* being met (and more) have an *obligation* to become aware of neediness among your neighbors, and somehow minister to that neediness—doing so constituting true worship. Don’t be like a typical American (guided by the values of greed, materialism, and selfishness) and make your primary goal becoming a member of the Billionaire’s Club! In effect, then, Amos also introduced a new Law, consisting of just one positive ethical command: Do justice—which involves ministering to the neediness that exists around you.

Finally, let me close this discussion of the Tradition in the prophets by quoting (once more) a beautiful passage from Micah (6:6 - 8): “What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” In a sense we have a new point added here, for Micah is saying in effect that to be part of the Tradition is not only to do what God wants in *general* terms (i.e., work to eliminate neediness), but do what God wants in more *specific* terms. And, Micah seems to be saying, one can only gain knowledge regarding *that* by *communing* with God, by staying “in tune” with God—by being ever alert to *revelations* that God might choose to give one. This might be done via petitionary prayers wherein one petitions God for guidance; but might also be done, e.g., via the type of institution introduced later and “meditative prayer” (referred to again at a later point). Again, we in effect have with Micah a restatement of the Law, such that the Law is solely of a Tradition nature—i.e., the Law is about *proper* worship of God.

Micah's allusion to communing with God raises the question: Does God only reveal truths to those who explicitly seek guidance from God? And in answering that question, I suggest that we consider the case of Samuel. In Chapter 3 of I Samuel we have that wonderful story of Samuel being called by God. Samuel had not *sought* anything from God; rather, *God chose* to speak to Samuel. The lesson here is that we should not be surprised if God reveals truths to certain people even though they have not asked God for revelations. I think here, for example, of Thorstein Veblen, one of the most creative social thinkers ever to have existed, in my opinion—and one of the great contributors to the Tradition. In reading his brilliant works one may not gain the sense that Veblen was a very spiritual man. In reading his biography,⁵²¹ however, one learns that spiritual matters were uppermost in his mind—the suggestion being that he didn't write about his ideas on such matters for publication because it would not have been fashionable (or “professional”) so to do.

In concluding my discussion of the Old Testament I feel compelled to quote what I regard as the most beautiful passage in the entire Old Testament—a passage that is “Traditional” if ever there was one: Job 29:12 - 17:

When the poor cried out, I helped them.
I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.
Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and
I helped widows find security.
I have always acted justly and fairly.
I was eyes for the blind,
and feet for the lame.
I was like a father to the poor
and took the side of strangers in trouble.
I destroyed the power of cruel men
and rescued their victims.

What we have here is another restatement of the Law, in effect. A restatement that is not only specific in content, but suggests that one should do God's will not out of sense of obligation, or a sense that one will receive a reward, but a simple sense that it is a *privilege* to do God's will. What a tremendous sentiment!

Which brings us to Jesus and his contribution to the Tradition. The first point I would make here is that to understand the nature of Jesus's “ministry” one must understand an important feature of

⁵²¹Joseph Dorfman, *Thorstein Veblen and His America*. New York: The Viking Press, 1934. See, e.g., p. 58.

the situation into which Jesus was born. An aspect of that situation was the Roman presence, but much more important was religious developments that had been occurring in Jesus's society. It appears that after the return from Babylonian Exile, thinking in Israel became less and less communitarian/societal in character and more and more individualistic. One manifestation of this change (devolution!) was that the covenant concept promulgated in Jesus's time was an inverted—and therefore *perverted*—version of the Old Testament covenant concept. The Old Testament covenant concept was that if you (as a *people*) follow my laws (whose thrust is to minister to the needy), I (God) will bless you (as a *people*).

The version of the covenant concept apparently taught in Jesus's day, however, was subtly different—sufficiently different, however, to in effect *invert* the Old Testament covenant. For the new covenant was: If I as an individual am doing well, this is because I am being blessed by God; and *that* means that I am behaving in a fashion pleasing to God. On the other hand, if someone is needy, that person obviously is not being blessed, which means that he is behaving in a manner *displeasing* to God. If not the person in question, then some *ancestor* of the person. That is, a person is needy because he has sinned, or an ancestor had—a point brought out in the amusing story of Jesus's healing of a man born blind in John 9.⁵²² Given such an interpretation of the covenant concept, one no longer had an obligation to *minister* to the needy. Rather, one now had a good reason to “*blame* the victim.” One could now argue that the needy person had brought his problems on himself; so that not only did one not *need* to help the needy, but it might very well be *sinful* so to do!

Another factor that helps explain the nature of Jesus's ministry is his status as a “*mamzer*” —an Israelite of suspect paternity.”⁵²³ In fact, “stories about Jesus from the later Tannaitic period . . . claim that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a union between his mother Miriam or Mary and a Roman soldier variously called Pandera, Pantera or Panthera.” Given that a tombstone of a Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera, who lived in Mary's time, has been discovered in Germany, it “is therefore just conceivable [pun intended?!] that this Pantera could have been Jesus'[s] true father.”⁵²⁴

Being a *mamzer* who was also rather intelligent, but of a lower class, Jesus would have been somewhat of an outsider, more alert to his societal situation than most of his fellows—and (therefore) more empathetic with those in need than most of his fellows. Also, in being an outsider he would have had time to reflect. And being intelligent, it is likely that early on he could sense that the societal situation was not as it should be—i.e., there should not be the stratification that he could readily observe. The critical occurrence in his life, however, was coming to know the content of Hebrew Scripture; for as he learned about God's will as expressed in Scripture, it became increasingly obvious to him that there was a serious disconnect between the Law and covenant in Scripture and what was being taught, in his time, by the “teachers of the Law.”

⁵²²Is this story actually about *spiritual*, rather than *physical*, blindness?

⁵²³Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 12.

⁵²⁴Ian Wilson, *Jesus: The Evidence*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996, p. 52.

Therefore, when he reached an age of sufficient maturity (likely about 30 years old), he resolved that, like (his cousin?) John the Baptizer (who may have been an Essene for a time?) he, too, needed to inaugurate a ministry. He saw his mission as being to:⁵²⁵

- Educate his fellows as to the nature of the True Law of God (i.e., that love of neighbor is the fundamental law)—often using parables,⁵²⁶ such as the Good Samaritan parable of Luke 10:25 - 37. Perhaps the most notable, however, of Jesus’s teaching efforts is the famous “plan of salvation” passage in Matthew 25:31 - 45, a portion of which is (vs. 35, 36):

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.

These six “injunctions”—which constitute an “operationalization” of the love command attributed to Jesus—are repeated *four times*—obviously to make the point that “this is what my ministry is all about, folks! Maybe if I repeat myself enough times, you’ll get the point!” (Unfortunately, Christianity has *not*; and when, e.g., one is handed a tract containing a “plan of salvation,” it likely makes no reference whatsoever to this passage!!)

- Inform his fellows that they were being taught an inverted, and therefore fraudulent, version of God’s law (a point embedded, e.g., in the Good Samaritan parable). Matthew 23, in a sense, supports this fact, although what that chapter focuses on is “hypocrisy” (suggesting that the writer of that gospel lacked a good understanding of the “roots” of Jesus’s ministry). For example, Matthew 23:23: “How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty.”
- Do what he, as an individual, could do to address neediness in his society (e.g., heal and

⁵²⁵I do not deny herein that “Throughout the earliest accounts of Jesus’[s] words are found predictions of a Kingdom of God that is soon to appear, in which God will rule.” (Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 128.) Indeed, Luke has Jesus assert (Luke 4:43) that his purpose was (not to die a sacrificial death on a cross to atone for our sins but, rather) to preach the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus, however, evidently convinced few people regarding this prediction, which prediction turned out to be a false one anyway. (Somehow this prediction of *God’s* imminent coming got “converted,” with some early Christians, into the prediction that *Jesus* would be returning “soon” (i.e., the Second Coming)—an expectation that one finds in all of Paul’s extant letters.) Which fact would seem to suggest that Jesus should be of little interest to us today. One can, however, argue that Jesus’s ministry is still relevant today in that the values he espoused are ones that we can accept today; and that because the Biblical “Kingdom” in “Kingdom of God” is best thought of as *kingship*, we moderns can retain Jesus’s “Kingship of God” idea by arguing that one allows God to be one’s king if one follows God’s commands—with the commands relevant for today being one’s that are revealed today.

⁵²⁶Note that Jesus’s “love of neighbor” command (e.g., Mark 12:29 – 31, derived from Leviticus 19:18) can itself be regarded as a sort of parable—given that it, like a true parable, demands interpretation.

exorcize). Whether the healings/exorcisms reported in the gospels actually occurred,⁵²⁷ the point is that the author's intent in including these stories was to make it clear that he regarded Jesus as being in the Tradition.

- Preach the coming Kingdom of God. That preaching had two functions. First, it was an attempt on his part to motivate “haves” to change their thinking and behavior: by threatening them with the “bad news” that God was coming down soon, he hoped that they would change their ways out of fear regarding how God would judge them when He arrived. Second, it was an attempt to give the needy (false?) hope—the “good news” that when God came, their lot would definitely improve.

It can be argued that Jesus not only tried to do what he could—directly and indirectly (via his preaching directed at “haves”)—to address the physical neediness present in his society, but also psychological/spiritual neediness. This point has, e.g., been pursued by Robert C. Leslie, who has examined a number of the encounters reported in the gospels involving Jesus in the light of logotherapy.⁵²⁸ And related to this, Elton Trueblood,⁵²⁹ e.g., has noted that the Jesus of the gospels often used humor, evidently recognizing thereby the healing power of humor. Conveniently, in his Appendix entitled “Thirty Humorous Passages in the Synoptic Gospels,” on p. 127, Trueblood listed the particular passages in the gospels that he had given attention in his book. The modern reader of these passages may, of course, fail to see the humor in these passages, for two reasons. First, we are separated in time by many centuries from the passages. Second, most of them are so familiar to us today that we give little thought to them.

One of the most relevant portions of the gospels for us moderns is found in John’s gospel, the references to a “Helper” in 14:15, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7. This “Helper” is identified as the Holy Spirit in 14:26. The significance of this reference is that the writer of John in effect is telling us that just as God had guided *Jesus’s* life, so is it possible that after Jesus’s departure, God—via the Holy Spirit—can guide *our* lives as well. (Meaning, e.g., that we should look to the Holy Spirit for guidance, rather than the Bible—a conclusion calculated to cause Martin Luther to turn in his grave!) This possibility is taken seriously by the institution that I discuss later—designed, in part, one might say, to “attract” the Holy Spirit.

The significance of these references to the Helper in John's gospel should be recognized as the “bombshells” that they are. For they suggest that, on the one hand, one should not use the Bible as one's authority—so that so-called “Bible churches” are, *by their very nature*, actually *unBiblical*! And suggest, on the other hand, that no individual (e.g., the Pope) should be treated as an authority either (a point solidified in Matthew 23, wherein Jesus is made to say that one should call no one Father except our Father in Heaven). Rather, one should look to *present-day*

⁵²⁷It’s possible that some of the *stories* in the gospels referring to miracles performed by Jesus were based on *parables* that Jesus had told—the writer of the gospel not being aware of this fact.

⁵²⁸*Jesus and Logotherapy: The Ministry of Jesus as Interpreted Through the Psychotherapy of Viktor [E.] Frankl*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

⁵²⁹*The Humor of Christ*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964.

revelation—something the Quakers, for example, do, and something that underlies the design of the institution I present later.

I should add that that design recognizes, with Paul, that the Holy Spirit can be looked to not only for guidance (i.e., ideas as to what to do) but for “possession”⁵³⁰—an idea, by the way, not absent from the Old Testament. For in I Samuel 9:5 - 7 we find (Samuel speaking to Saul): “At the entrance to the town you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill, playing harps, drums, flutes, and lyres. They will be dancing and shouting. Suddenly the spirit of the LORD will take control of you, and you will join in their religious dancing and shouting and will become a different person. When these things happen, do whatever God leads you to do.”

Paul recognized (Romans 7) that although in his *mind* he knew what he should and should not do, what he called his “human nature” (what today we might term his *socialized* nature) caused him to do what he abhorred, and to refrain from doing what he *wanted* to do. He added, however, that (Chapter 8) if one is filled with the Holy Spirit (which, v. 6, “results in life and peace”), one will be able to overcome one’s “human nature”—one’s supposedly innate sinful nature. And in Galatians 5:16 - 25 Paul wrote at some length regarding the behavioral contrast between being controlled by human nature as opposed to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, although Paul claimed to admire the Law (e.g., Romans 7:12 and 8:22), and Acts 22:3 has him claim that had studied under Gamaliel (a famous rabbi of the time), his letters give one no indication that he knew the first thing about the Law! So that although the Pentateuch is very definitely reflected in the gospels, it is not at all reflected in Paul’s letters!

Still, Paul must be recognized as an important contributor to the Tradition in that he recognized that it is not enough to have a set of rules: just because one has a thorough knowledge of what one should, and should not, do, it does not follow that one will be able to *follow* those rules. What one needs, in addition, is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that one’s behavior will be controlled (or at least affected) by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, Paul, in his letters, provided no guidance as to *how* one can become Spirit-filled. But we need not regard that failure on Paul’s part as a serious one, for my institution is designed to “attract” the Holy Spirit—to not only provide ideas/insights to participants, but to “possess” them—thereby changing (at least on a temporary basis) their personalities and behavior for the better.

In addition, Paul’s use of a body analogy (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) can be interpreted as a “picture” of the Good Society—Paul’s version of the “utopian” situation (of, e.g., Isaiah 65:21, 22) referred to earlier. If the “picture” offered in, e.g., Isaiah is rather individualistic in nature, that offered by Paul is decidedly *societal*.⁵³¹ In effect, Paul sees a society as consisting of individuals and households, with different individuals/households engaged in different tasks (a “division of labor” à la Adam Smith!), but doing so in a harmonious manner. In Paul’s view no one part is more important than another, and the implication here is that the Good Society would

⁵³⁰For a brilliant discussion of relevance here see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1995.

⁵³¹ The origins of Paul’s body analogy is a topic that has been of interest to some scholars (e.g., Michelle V. Lee and Andrew E. Hill).

be rather “flat”—i.e., lacking a clear hierarchy, whether of influence, status, or wealth. There is also a suggestion here that if interaction ceases to become harmonious, the society itself will die. Providing us, thereby, with a warning that unless we begin to work for societal system change—in the direction of increasing harmony (and, I would add, greater ecological responsibility)—we face the danger of societal collapse (and perhaps the very extinction of our species).

In concluding this brief discussion of the New Testament, I would like to make reference to the rather prosaic Letter from James—which may or may not have been written by Jesus’s brother James,⁵³² but likely *does* express the views of many of the early (Jewish) followers.⁵³³ At 1:27 James states: “What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.” In effect, James repeated Jesus’s injunction to love the neighbor, but in a more concrete form; and also recognized that there is a dominant worldview “out there” that guides most people, but must be resisted—because it is “out of tune” with the love of neighbor command. In addition, James makes the point that what’s important is to be *religious*—rather than a Jew, Christian, or whatever. Martin Luther had a low opinion of the Letter of James—but all *that* means is that he thereby demonstrated his inability (or was it unwillingness?) to discern the plain message of the Bible.

What can we say in summary of the Bible’s “message” for us today? Let me make the following points:

- We are given “pictures” of the Good Society—a brief individualistic one in the “Old Testament,” and Paul’s (more relevant) body analogy in 1 Corinthians.
- Although neither of these “pictures” makes this explicit, in both cases the situation referred to is implicitly one of widespread well-being. In that sense, both are comparable to the definition of a Good Society that I offered near the end of the Introduction—with my concept being the most relevant for today’s United States.
- A situation of universal well-being does not now exist, but can be attained.
- It will be attained—if at all—via human activities. Paul would add that the Holy Spirit is available for assisting us in this endeavor.
- We are given behavioral injunctions which, when acted upon, will result in attainment of the Good Society—if, that is, enough action is engaged in.
- Given that the existing society is not at all egalitarian, it is most important that the society’s “haves” act on these (God-given) injunctions.

⁵³²See, e.g., Jeffrey J. Bütz, *The Brother of Jesus and the Lost Teachings of Christianity*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2005.

⁵³³Gomes (*op. cit.*, p. 16) states, in fact: “Recent scholarship places the Epistle of James as first by date [of the books constituting the “New Testament”], followed by I Thessalonians.”

- The writer of John's gospel has Jesus declare that upon his departure a Helper will be available. Presumably this Helper will provide us with ideas as to the "shape" of the Good Society, and ideas as to the steps necessary to take to move in a Good Society direction.
- Paul referred to an indwelling by the Holy Spirit, and indicated that this would result in positive personal characteristics and positive behaviors.
- Paul was aware of the fact that one can *desire* to "do right," but find that difficult. He did not, however, seem to recognize that one can *lack* a desire to follow God's laws—and be so evil as to *invert* those laws while claiming that they were God's (something Jesus came to recognize). Indeed, for all of his talk about the Law, Paul gives precious little evidence of having any detailed knowledge of it!
- Although gives importance to the Holy Spirit, he presents us with no guidelines as to how to access that Spirit—either as a Helper or as an indweller.

It is because of this lack in Paul that I herein present an institution that is designed to "attract" the Holy Spirit. As I have pointed out in this section, Spirit plays a role in various parts of the Bible, but the impression is usually given that humans have no control over it. It may be presumptuous of me to assert that the institution that I will be discussing has the *potential* to attract the Holy Spirit, but I sincerely believe that it has such a potential.

The "American" Nature of My Proposal

The institution that I propose herein is a type of association,⁵³⁴ and it needs to be pointed out here that private associations have a long history in this country. After Alexis de Tocqueville (accompanied by Gustave de Beaumont) visited the United States⁵³⁵ (from May 11, 1831, to February 20, 1832), de Tocqueville wrote a two-volume work giving his assessment of the America that he had visited, entitled *Democracy in America*.⁵³⁶ Of particular interest for our purposes here is Chapter V ("Of the Use Which the Americans Make of Public Associations in Civil Life") of the Second Book ("Influence of Democracy on the Feelings of the Americans"), pp. 129-134 in Vol. II of the book.

The author of the article on de Tocqueville on the <http://en.wikipedia.org> web site writes: "As [a] critic of individualism, Tocqueville thought that through associating, the coming together of people for mutual purpose[s], both in public and private, Americans are able to overcome selfish desires, thus making both a self-conscious and active political society and a vibrant civil society

⁵³⁴ For the role of associations in early Christianity see, e.g., Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

⁵³⁵ Their trip is described in George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939.

⁵³⁶ One can gain access to Vol. II at: <http://books.google.com>. This is the third edition, published by Sever and Francis (Cambridge) in 1863. It was translated from the French by Henry Reeve, and edited, with notes, by Francis Bowen.

functioning independently from the state.” Indicating that de Tocqueville was interested in the *consequences* of associating (not just causes), thereby having an interest in associations much from the perspective that I demonstrate below.

De Tocqueville⁵³⁷ noted that the *political* associations that he observed in the United States are (p. 129) “only a single feature in the midst of the immense assemblage of associations in that country. Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies⁵³⁸, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, —religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive.” “Thus [continued de Tocqueville, p. 130], the most democratic country on the face of the earth [i.e., the United States] is that in which men have, in our time, carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires, and have applied this new science to the greatest number of purposes.” “Nothing, in my opinion [concluded de Tocqueville, p. 134], is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America.”

“Is this [development, de Tocqueville continued, p. 130] the result of accident? Or is there in reality any necessary connection between the principle of association and that of equality?” This appears to be a rhetorical question on de Tocqueville’s part. That is, he seemed to attribute the prevalence of associations in the United States to the relative equality in conditions that he observed. Indeed, de Tocqueville closed Chapter V by asserting: “If men are to remain civilized, or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased.”

De Tocqueville added that (p. 132) “Feelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed, only by the reciprocal influence of men upon each other”—such as occurs when people meet in associations. In addition (p. 134), “In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made.” So that not only does participation in an association affect, help shape, one’s opinions, it also opens one to one’s empathetic emotions, and helps develop one’s intellectual powers. In addition, creative ideas are produced by associations, so that the very progress of the society—in various dimensions—is dependent on a continuing role of associations in the society.

Since de Tocqueville’s visit to America associations have continued to play an important role in American society, but our society has become more inegalitarian. A notable reason for this is that we are no longer a nation of basically small economic units. Instead, we are a nation of many employees and a few employers, with firms of various sizes, but large firms—within which the individual employee has little if any voice—being dominant. And using that

⁵³⁷ Theda Skocpol, in “What Tocqueville Missed,” has provided an interesting, if brief, critique of Tocqueville at: www.slate.com/toolbar.aspx?action=print&id=2081. For example: The “early American civic vitality that so entranced Alexis de Tocqueville was closely tied up with the representative institutions and centrally directed activity of a very distinctive national state.” The article is adapted from Skocpol’s presidential address to the annual meeting of the Social Science History Association in 1996.

⁵³⁸ Presumably such “associations” were different from the others that he gave that label in that they consisted of owners and employees rather than people on an equal footing; i.e., they were what we would call *firms*.

dominance to control our political institutions, and even (via, e.g., “think tanks” financed by members of the elite via their individual wealth or firms over which they have control) our thoughts.⁵³⁹

Thus, even though private associations are still important in our society, the sort of enthusiasm that de Tocqueville observed in the early 1830s seems no longer to exist—in part because of the nature of our society (e.g., it is highly urbanized now), in part because of the “thought control” exercised by the elite. Because of that control, although it is not surprising that we have many associations devoted to various “mopping up” operations (i.e., addressing the problems that elite decisions have brought about!), it is also not surprising that associations having the purpose of bringing about societal system change are in short supply: such associations pose a threat to the elite, so that the elite can be expected to discourage the formation of such associations. By using criminal means if necessary—perhaps being “decriminalized” by efforts to change the laws to their advantage. The pity here is that the elite can be expected to fight efforts at societal system change even if their own survival turns out to be dependent on it! Members of the elite (some of them at any rate) may be smart, but virtually none of them are wise, it would seem.

Given that the institution that I am about to propose has the intent of being a vehicle for bringing about societal system change (with the help of the Holy Spirit), those who participate in it will need to be alert to the dangers of their efforts becoming known to members of the elite (and its lackeys). They need to be as wise as serpents, while being as harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). They also need to cognizant of the fact that although societal system change is needed today, and the Bible gives us a basis for working for that end, we may be severely criticized by many “Christian” leaders, on the one hand, and be met with a great deal of apathy, on the other hand. Still, if after reading the rest of this paper you become convinced regarding the need for societal system change and the merits of the institution proposed here for bringing that about (among other possibilities), please do not let the potential obstacles “out there” deter you from acting on my proposal. Just be careful in doing so!

Characteristics of a Structured Interaction Group (SIG): Introduction

The Structured Interaction Group (SIG)—the institution introduced here—is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France);⁵⁴⁰ a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries;⁵⁴¹ and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

⁵³⁹ See, e.g., Chapter XXII (“The Emancipation of Belief”) in (pp. 242-52) John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economics and the Public Purpose*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973.

⁵⁴⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*. New York: Random House, 179, pp. 41-43.

⁵⁴¹ Medicine Story, “Circles of Freedom,” *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, “Calling the Circle,” *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox “out of the blue.” How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a SIG my personal experience with the adult “Sunday school” class at the church that I have been attending since 1980. The group has consisted of individuals who have certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group has his/her unique personality, each has had different life experiences, different educational levels are represented, etc. The group is not a random sample of American society, of course, but still is rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views are represented. Despite the latter fact, we all have felt free to express our views (so long as they are not too “heretical”!), because we know that the others in the group would respect them; for there has been a general consensus in the group that we are all “seekers,” and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I have led this group at various times, and have, during those periods, attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. So that when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes’s *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (cited earlier), I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group has been extremely important in my own spiritual development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves), and until recently I have attended these Sunday sessions “religiously.”

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as “love the neighbor” is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a “fleshing out” of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps “energize” them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a “natural high”) during a given SIG session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to have a “high” that lasted continuously for over three months.⁵⁴² I don’t know why I was granted this valuable experience,⁵⁴³ but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon

⁵⁴²In addition, two books have given me a “natural high”: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. New York: New American Library, 1958. First published by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1904. Louis Wallis, *Sociological Study of the Bible*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912. I read the first book in 1959, the second in 1984.

⁵⁴³During that period my perceptions changed so that, e.g., I was perceiving differences in *kind*, but not *degree*. I recall, e.g., talking to a young woman during that period, encouraging her to run for a local political office. She responded that she felt that she was somewhat of a freak in being rather tall. Up to that point I had not noticed that “fact” about her. The “lesson” that I learned from that experience is that although it is “natural” to perceive differences in kind, such is not the case for differences in degree: such differences are ones that our minds *impose* on reality.

cross-culturally and historically.⁵⁴⁴ And, second, believe that such an experience was common with the first “Jesuans.”⁵⁴⁵

Characteristics of a Structured Interaction Group (SIG): Specifics

What is a Structured Interaction Group? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

Participants in a given SIG meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”⁵⁴⁶); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random⁵⁴⁷) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one SIG session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a SIG is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation⁵⁴⁸ were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four SIG sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first SIG, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random

⁵⁴⁴See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

⁵⁴⁵For a brilliant discussion see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1995. See in particular Chapter 12 (“The Christian Cult,” pp. 170 - 87).

⁵⁴⁶The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

⁵⁴⁷Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

⁵⁴⁸I recommend that SIG sessions *not* be restricted to members of the particular congregation involved—that, indeed, an effort be made to bring “neighbors” into the group—to increase the degree of diversity of participants.

procedure. This means not only that participants in a SIG do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense).⁵⁴⁹ Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The SIG, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a SIG all accept Jesus’s love of the neighbor command as their central “creed,” the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to that creed.⁵⁵⁰

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity.⁵⁵¹ It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop”⁵⁵² passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet’s immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from

⁵⁴⁹See, e.g., writings by Michael Parenti and G. William Domhoff.

⁵⁵⁰I am reminded here of Matthew Fox’s statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. (*Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 (“Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey”).

⁵⁵¹In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to SIG participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998). For example, Shepard states (p. 155): “Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself.” Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have “designed” us for such an activity.

⁵⁵²Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus symbolizing well the goal of a SIG to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, *Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles⁵⁵³

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during SIG sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept the truism that one person's views are as worth of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.
- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one's truth”⁵⁵⁴ and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
- d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one's own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one's *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one's *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at

⁵⁵³Compare with Paul's comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

⁵⁵⁴This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a “talking hoop” (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.

- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given SIG will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Structured Discussion Group are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the SIG, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the SIG is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the SIG has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁵One with a scientific background might say that the SIG represents an “operationalization”—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

Possible Consequences of SIG Participation

George Edgin Pugh, in his important *The Biological Origin of Human Values*,⁵⁵⁶ discusses “instinctive human motives” (pp. 284 – 87), and among them lists an enjoyment of conversation.⁵⁵⁷ The Structured Discussion Group (SIG) implicitly recognizes this as an important motive (or *need*, if you prefer), and uses it as the basis for making the fulfillment of that need a vehicle for bringing about the Good Society—i.e., a society within which the positive individual traits listed above are not only commonplace, but are fostered by the society.

Participation in a SIG can have a great variety of consequences, and in this section I wish to identify and discuss possible kinds of consequences, under several headings. I identify only *positive* consequences because—frankly—I believe that only such consequences would result from SIG participation!

Possible consequences of SIG participation can be identified and discussed at three different “scales”: (1) implications for SIG participants—as individuals and as a group; (2) societal implications; and (3) implications for other societies. Each is discussed in turn, but first some introductory comments.

Let me begin by asserting that if there is magic in ritual,⁵⁵⁸ then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture.”⁵⁵⁹ The “magic” in a SIG, it seems to me, lies in one’s being aware of

⁵⁵⁶New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977.

⁵⁵⁷ His complete list: (1) a desire for dominance (rivalry), (2) a desire for approval, (3) a desire for social acceptance, (4) gregariousness, (5) the enjoyment of conversation, (6) an activity motive (a desire to exercise the body and develop physical skills), (7) the enjoyment of humor in conversation and play, (8) social preferences, (9) a team motive (a desire to work with others for common goals), (10) a constructive motive (a desire to make/build things), and (11) a contribution motive (a desire to contribute, to do something meaningful for one’s society). Pugh notes (p. 285) that “the proposed list of instinctive motives is sure to be controversial . . .,” but may only (partial) objection is to the first motive he lists—a desire for dominance. I would assert, rather, that individuals naturally vary in their position on a leader-follower continuum. The fact of this variation can—under certain circumstances—lead to some individuals, in acting on the motive, becoming autocrats. Yet, it is not inevitable that this occur. Although generally I see a tendency toward dominance in negative terms (and have designed the SIG to control the tendency, while also encouraging leadership tendencies in those more inclined to follow), I also recognize that any society needs both leaders and followers. In fact, if my SIG proposal is to “get off the ground,” some individuals with leadership qualities will need to “start the ball rolling”—and others who are more inclined to follow will need to perceive the value in the movement, and become a part of it as followers. There is, of course, a danger in those with followership tendencies to become too passive, submissive, and those with leadership abilities to recognize this tendency in others, and take advantage of it—by becoming autocratic. I believe, however, that SIG participation can foster the development of “habits of thought and action” such that these “natural” tendencies become suppressed—at least to the point that they do not pose a threat to the society.

⁵⁵⁸Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991.

⁵⁵⁹Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899. In actuality, however, institutions should *not* be regarded as “furniture”—as things that are “just there.” For a central assumption of this essay is that institutions play a highly significant role in *shaping* thoughts and action. If I did not believe this, I would not be proposing the creations of SIGs!

the possible consequences associated with participation in a SIG. That is, if one knows in advance what sorts of consequences participation in a SIG may have, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one's thinking and behavior, *foreknowledge* of possible consequences of participation can also impact one's thinking and behavior.

I find it interesting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher Max C. Otto,⁵⁶⁰ in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the SIG, because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in SIG sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a SIG fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

1. Implications for Participants

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a SIG would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a SIG, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the SIG in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a SIG proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression

⁵⁶⁰*The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life*. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V (“Realistic Idealism,” pp. 128 - 53).

of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the SIG—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the SIG's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a SIG as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a SIG—the individual “crazinesses” will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.”⁵⁶¹ (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Precisely *because* I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from SIG sessions, I believe that there will be *sociological* implications for participants. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the SIG has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the SIG's design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the SIG is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a SIG can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking one's mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one's interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one's claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

⁵⁶¹See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, “Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy,” in *Modern Therapies*, edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control⁵⁶² others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies⁵⁶³ may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a SIG will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the SIG as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will experience improvement in their physical,⁵⁶⁴ emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the SIG experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.⁵⁶⁵ And are too

⁵⁶²They may perceive this as exercising “leadership,” rather. That is, they may put a positive “spin” on their objectionable behavior.

⁵⁶³For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

⁵⁶⁴Including psychosomatic ones. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man’s Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

⁵⁶⁵Few Christians seem to understand the fact that “God” can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept see Daniel C. Maguire, “More People: Less Earth: The

narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g. a Buddhist perspective⁵⁶⁶) blasphemous.

Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.⁵⁶⁷ On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit; and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity “out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being,). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as *also* constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Despite the fact that participation in a SIG likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a SIG will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked”⁵⁶⁸ Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a SIG can one experience Deity in our society,⁵⁶⁹ I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not

Shadow of Man-Kind,” in (pp. 1 - 63) *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four (“God: The Heart of Reality”) in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

⁵⁶⁶See Raymond Panikkar, “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

⁵⁶⁷Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and the movie *Groundhog Day* (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are *systems*, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the society and the dominant value system associated with those “peopling” the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, but this is not the place to present that strategy.

⁵⁶⁸“The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

⁵⁶⁹L. Robert Keck has introduced “meditative prayer” as an alternate “path to the Spirit.” See his *The Spirit of Synergy: God’s Power and You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his

all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience.”⁵⁷⁰ A SIG, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a SIG can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the SIG. If SIGs involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to humankind’s survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind’s very existence is currently being threatened by “global warming,” among other factors.⁵⁷¹

2. Societal Implications

The reference here is specifically to *our* society, the following subsection making a few comments on implications beyond our borders. The reference to “global warming” in the previous paragraph should perhaps be included in this subsection; but as its reference is to humankind, and uses a term—“salvation”—more commonly used in discussing individuals than humankind in general, I thought it more “natural” to place it where I did.

Given that my primary concern herein is with the Good Society—which I am defining as a society within which various positive personal traits are commonplace, and which fosters the development and retention of such traits—the first point to make here is that I foresee that among the ideas generated during SIG sessions will be ideas regarding how to change the “shape” of the society so that it will “produce” and value members who have the personal qualities listed earlier. Individuals vary, of course, in their genetic endowment and in their experiences (etc.)—meaning that some members of the Good Society will possess positive traits to a greater degree than others. But even with a given member there will be variation *over time* in the degree to which one possesses any given positive trait: even the best of us will feel anger, envy, etc., and be rude, presumptuous, etc. at some time.

Insofar as there is a proliferation of SIGs within the society, those associated with them have the best chance of acquiring positive traits, and as habits. But other mechanisms/institutions might also come to be created that also have such an effect. I have already mentioned the small eco-community⁵⁷² as an institution that might help address the “global warming” problem, among

Chapter 7 (“Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime”), refers (p. 125) to “the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about,” and (p. 126) “hitting the wall” in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

⁵⁷⁰Marraine C. Kettell, “Becoming Ourselves,” a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

⁵⁷¹See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

⁵⁷²I especially have in mind cooperative eco-communities (CECs), but should also mention Ecological Company Towns (ECTs)—the former involving community ownership of all real property, the latter such ownership by an individual or firm. A “plus” associated with both from a “global warming” standpoint is that they would eliminate

other problems. I would add here that the mere fact of living in such a community might also so contribute. I hesitate go beyond what I have already stated on the subject, given that I expect SIGs to generate creative ideas—and that it is impossible to predict in advance what shape they might take.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there are likely to be changes in the governmental structure of the society, so let me briefly comment on possible changes in that realm. One change that I would anticipate would be the elimination of bicameral legislatures—a change that would be made difficult because involving constitutional change, but a sort of change that is at least conceivable (especially if a society is a Good Society, as I have defined it). At present, only the state of Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, and I am not aware that Nebraskans regard that as a problem. Given this, why not rid our society of the U. S. Senate and all other “upper” legislative chambers? Bicameral legislatures were created in the first place to block democratic decision-making—and perhaps are appropriate for societies within which the positive personal traits listed earlier are not common. Their purpose, however, would be non-existent in the Good Society, so that their existence would only serve to make governmental decision-making cumbersome—and more expensive than it would need to be.

Assuming this sort of change, an additional sort of change that is recommended is to change how legislators—often called “representatives,” without good reason!—are selected. Currently, they are commonly selected from electoral districts or are elected “at large.” The former method is subject to “gerrymandering” (an issue addressed by the Supreme Court especially in the 1960s), and neither method will ensure a “replica of the realm” legislature (or “portrait in miniature,” to use John Adams’s terminology). Existing methods of selecting legislators should be replaced with some sort of “proportional representation” system—such as the “list” system (in which case one votes for a “party”—which develops a list of candidates, and lists individuals in order of the party’s judgment as to qualifications), which produces a “representative” (in a statistical sense) assembly in that seats are awarded in proportion to number of votes received by party.

Related to these changes of an institutional nature, there would be a disappearance—one would hope!—of the lobbyist as an “institution”! This change might not please lobbyists, but because there would be a reduction in firms and other organizations wanting to hire lobbyists, there would be little demand for such people—so that people having this employment would be forced to seek employment elsewhere.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there also would be changes—significant ones, most likely—in the society’s economy, so that it is also advisable to comment on anticipated changes in that realm. I foresee two changes as of especial importance—these having a variety of implications, some of which I will mention below. First, the *per-capita* consumption of goods is likely to reduced substantially. Second, “production for use” is likely to become more common than it is now.

the need for journey-to-work trips involving the use of an automobile. Rather, one could simply either walk or bike to the place of employment.

Recently, during a church service, we were handed a card with the following quotation from Adam Hamilton's *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity*:⁵⁷³

Lord, help me
to be grateful for what I have,
to remember that I don't need most of what I want,
and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.

As my discussion above suggests, I agree entirely with this statement, but would add that I regard it as rather incomplete. (But, then, a small card will not accommodate many words!) Most importantly, I would add that anyone who comes to recognize that s/he doesn't really need most of what s/he has will then—logically—give that excess to those who *can* make use of it (or simply discard that portion that would not be needed by anyone), and change future buying habits. This changed purchasing behavior may be combined with a desire to oneself produce for at least some of one's needs (e.g., by engaging in gardening, building one's own furniture, etc.), and insofar as these changes occur, the implications for the economy can be considerable. Given that many goods currently consumed would no longer be purchased:

- Many production facilities in this country would be forced to close down.
- Many goods currently imported would no longer be.
- Many retail stores selling such goods would be forced to close.

Such changes would likely result in many people moving from larger cities to smaller ones—or to eco-communities or rural areas.

The fact that the number of work and shopping trips would decline greatly would mean that automobile (and automobile parts) production-importation would be reduced, as would be the number of automotive service stations, and automotive repair shops. Petroleum refineries would also be forced to shut down—but there likely would be the development of facilities for producing biofuels (from algae, e.g.).

Insofar as structures would continue to be built,⁵⁷⁴ they likely would be built to be energy-efficient and less subject to deterioration over time. Therefore, there would be a shift in the production of materials used, and less new building during a given year.

⁵⁷³ Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.

⁵⁷⁴ Likely there would be less construction activity because the economy would become less “dynamic”: there would be less economic activity, less growth in such activity, less internal migration in response to economic shifts of a geographic nature, etc. For discussions of the virtues of, and prospects for, a non-growth economy see, e.g., Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (second edition); and Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*. Sustainable Development Commission, n.d.

Although work- and shopping-related movement might be reduced substantially, I would expect a significant increase in travel for sightseeing purposes—trips to experience natural features such as the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Devil’s Tower, etc., and also trips to visit historical sites such as restored Shaker communities, the Washington monument, Gettysburg, etc.

A final point that I would like to mention in this subsection is that insofar as positive personal traits such as the ones listed above become commonplace, there would be little need for police officers, lawyers, judges, prison officials-guards, etc., so that those professions would basically disappear.

Note that I have been referring to the disappearance of many jobs/professions as a “natural” accompaniment to the development of the Good Society, and a question likely to arise is: What will these unemployed people then do?! One suggestion I will offer here is: Create an eco-community for yourself and others, or move to one already existing! What I am hoping is that enterprising individuals—whether or not unemployed—will step forth to create a new sort of capitalistic society! Michael Moore’s recent movie *Capitalism* suggests that capitalism is inherently an evil sort of economic system. Michael, please read this paper; you may change your mind!

3. Implications for Other Societies

I will be very brief here. Movement, within our society, in a Good Society direction will mean that more and more of our fellows will develop positive personal traits. In acting on those traits they will act not only to make our society a better place to live, but will do the same for other societies. In doing so, I would only caution them to be sensitive of cultural differences that exist between other societies and ours so that we will refrain from doing unintentional damage to the fabric of other societies.

Conclusions

The intended audience for this paper is clergy and church lay leaders. I anticipate that such individuals who find merit in the proposal I offer herein would use this paper as a resource for writing *their own* papers (along with announcements, advertisements, etc.). In doing so, I would expect them to write papers (etc.) that would reflect their particular theological views, and would emphasize points that *they* deemed as of especial importance. Finally, I would expect that whatever literature they write, it would not be as burdened with footnotes as the paper in front of you!

Should you choose to act on my proposal here, you are not under any obligation—it goes without saying—to refer to the discussions groups involved as Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs). I have, myself, in writing about the concept over the years, used different terminology—such as Kingdom of God Fellowship (suggesting that the kingship of God occurs when individuals follow God’s Word—obtained via revelation in this case), Seminoar (the “oar” here alluding to a Viking spirit of adventure—my ethnic heritage being Norwegian and Swedish), and New Word

Fellowship (the “new word” alluding to revealed truth, obtained via continuing revelation of the sort believed in by Quakers⁵⁷⁵).

Unless one lives in a cave, one is fully aware of the fact that we are living in dangerous times—with not only the threat from thermonuclear weapons, but also “global warming.” Personally, I view the latter as our most serious threat because it appears that we are marching inexorably toward oblivion: Scientist James Lovelock predicted recently that he expects our species (along with many other ones, of course) to be close to extinction by 2100 CE, and I have a great deal of respect for his views (regarding “global warming,” at any rate). A “technological fix” sort of solution to this problem (such as being advocated by “geo-engineers”) runs the risk of having unpredictable side effects that might be worse than “global warming” itself. And a switchover to alternate (non-polluting) energy sources will be difficult given the influence of vested interests in continued fossil fuel use. Besides, such a switchover—if it could be accomplished soon—would address the “global warming” problem while allowing all of our other problems to continue, and even worsen.

Although I am not a Quaker, I am a firm believer in continuing revelation—which is why I place so much faith in the SIG as a vehicle for ushering in the Good Society. We humans have been creating our own “flood” over the past 250 years (ever since the Agricultural Revolution, in fact?), so that if we manage to destroy ourselves (and many others of God’s creatures) through our arrogance and foolishness, we will be committing the most terrible kind of blasphemy.

Rather than continuing in our errant ways, why don’t we wake up and take heed of Jesus’s promise of leaving us with a Helper. I was raised by parents, who themselves had been raised in a Norwegian Lutheran church, but with others helped build an Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, Wisconsin. Although I long ago drifted away from that denomination, I recall with fondness having black missionaries from Africa visiting our church, singing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” with the other children in the congregation—and learning the truth that there *is* a Holy Spirit. I perceive the Structured Interaction Group as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit speaking to us today—and would even go so far as to claim that the *idea* for the SIG was granted to me by the Holy Spirit.

The SIG may not be the only answer (indirect and direct) to our problems as Americans and as humans. I am convinced, however, that it *can* be a significant answer. However, it is an idea that will gain life only if clergy and church lay leaders embrace it, and act on it. Amen (i.e., may it be so).

In the Introduction I asserted that clergy should assume the responsibility of providing leadership for the “movement” that I have advocated herein, and the question arises: Why “pick on” clergy by placing a mantle of leadership on them? Several reasons can be mentioned:

- I noted near the end of Section C that there would be difficulties in initiating the “program” that I have been proposing herein. An advantage offered by churches (and synagogues, etc.) is that many in our society are in the habit of attending religious services on Saturdays or Sundays, so that the creation of SIG sessions associated with

⁵⁷⁵ A friend and I attended a local Quaker service together a number of years ago.

religious institutions would be able to draw upon this habit. Many churches have already introduced “alternate” services, and a SIG could be regarded as a type of such service, or could be introduced as a supplement to whatever services a given church/synagogue already had.

- A movement to bring about societal system change—with SIGs leading the way—would, of course, be a “subversive” movement; a movement that would use peaceful means, but have a subversive intent. As such, it would run the risk of being sabotaged, or even destroyed, by the society’s elite. However, a movement for societal system change “housed” in religious institutions might be able to avoid the elite’s attention. Even if members of the elite *did* become aware of a SIG movement, they might be reluctant to attack it given its religious nature and the religious freedom prized in our society.
- In recent years there has been a rise of “neoliberalism”⁵⁷⁶—usually regarded as a conservative philosophy!—and so regarded because its fixation on “free markets” and the claim that governments can only “interfere” in the economy. (The “philosophy” has its basis in ideas presented by Adam Smith in his famous 1776 *The Wealth of Nations*, but “radicalizes” Smith’s ideas.) Ironically, in that my proposal is based on people acting as *private* individuals (but does not view government as an evil), it can be construed as a “neoliberal” one. This means that if members of the elite (or its lackeys) become aware of a SIG movement, it is likely to perplex them: its *intent* would be to bring about societal system change (which they would not want, given that they are parasites within the Existing Order), yet its *means* would be capitalistic in being of a “free market” variety! In being perplexed by the movement—given that logically they can have no objections to it!—they might not know how to respond, and therefore *not* respond. Perhaps some would even join the movement—and become significant assets to the movement.
- The churches have much to atone for (as the brief discussion of Joe Hill on the cover suggests). Not only have the churches been ignoring the basic “thrust” of the Bible—its orientation to “right behavior,” behavior that, if it were to become widespread, would help usher in the Good Society. By inventing the term “social gospel” they have given the false impression that there is a “social” gospel and then there is a “real” *other* gospel: there is only *one* gospel, and it *is* a social gospel! By having an orientation to the afterlife (less true today than in the past), they have tended to ignore the “commandments” of Matthew 25 (i.e., feed the hungry, etc.); they have even somehow managed to not recognize the obvious fact that the Matthew 25 passage presents a *plan of salvation*: if one fails to heed its injunctions, one runs the risk of spending eternity in a very warm—and otherwise unpleasant—place.

If the above isn’t reason enough to give the churches an opportunity to redeem themselves, there is the fact—illustrated by the Joe Hill case—that too often the churches have played a societal role that has been not merely unBiblical, but *anti*-Biblical. One should expect, then, that the clergy would be anxious to “get on” with the business of implementing the proposal presented herein.

576 See, e.g., David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

By giving clergy a leadership position in the movement I do not mean to suggest that non-clergy should not also become involved in the movement. After all, private associations have a long history in our country, so that becoming involved in a SIG movement would be a very American thing to do—whether or not one is a clergy person. In fact, the more people who are involved in the movement, the greater the chances of its success.

November 27, 2009

Restoring The Tradition as a Religious One

Alton C. Thompson

With Christmas “just around the corner,” I am reminded of the song, “If Every Day Was Like Christmas,” first sung by Elvis Presley, with The Jordanaires, 1966, with music and lyrics created by Robert Gene (“Red”) West, an associate of Presley.

The song refers to the Christmas season as “the season of cheer;” refers to having a “choir singing sweetly,” that results in a “glow” filling “my heart,” making one feel that “I am at peace with the world.” The song then goes on to ask: “Why can’t every day be like Christmas; why can’t that feeling go on endlessly”? For if every day were like Christmas, “What a wonderful world that would be”! The song concludes with the singer saying that he hears a child telling Santa what he wants for Christmas, and that “the smile upon his tiny face Is worth more to me than anything.”

I would guess that most people who identify with Christianity would regard this song as non-religious, even *unreligious*. Indeed, even Brian P. Hudson, in his “Christmas Counterpoint,” written for The Secular Web (<http://secweb.infidels.org/article737.html>) puts the song on his list of Christmas songs “with no or negligible religious elements.”

But *should* the song be so perceived—as, indeed, perhaps even bordering on blasphemy for failing to recognize the “real purpose” of Christmas. That being, so the story goes, to celebrate the birth of “our savior”?

My answer here is twofold:

- The song is, in fact, in the same Tradition of which Jesus was a part. So that if that Tradition is thought of as a “religious” one, it follows that the Presley song is a religious one. The song may be a rather *banal* part of that Tradition, true: as the saying goes, if you want to say something stupid, make it the lyrics of a song and no one will notice! But despite the banality of the lyrics, they can reasonably be thought of as a part of the same Tradition as the one Jesus was in.⁵⁷⁷
- Given that Jesus was a part of certain Tradition—with some individuals before him, others afterward—it is an insult to his life on earth to celebrate his *birth* (and *death*—on “Good Friday”), but fail to establish any “holyday” for the celebration of his *life*—as if *that* was of no consequence. In addition, it is an insult to the *Tradition* to give attention

⁵⁷⁷ The title of the song reminds me of Leonard L. Thompson’s statement that “Man [i.e., the human] is [in the Bible, presented as] either in harmony or out of tune with the Lord. Actually, spatial rather than musical terminology is used here [i.e., in the Bible] to describe those two perspectives: man at-center properly oriented to his world, or man off-center in chaos and disorientation. A number of dualities can be drawn from the Bible to compare and contrast those two perspectives. The goal of human existence, as represented in the biblical world, is to live perpetually at the center.” *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978, p. 13. By the way Leonard is not a relative.

to just one member of it—and to give no attention the matter of *what* the Tradition *has* been—and *should* be now—“about.”

The questions that especially arise from the above statements—in conjunction with the imminent approach of Christmas—are:

- What is the *nature* of the Tradition being referred to here?
- What was *Jesus*’s role in that Tradition?
- How, specifically, should we conceive the nature of that Tradition *today*—and what should *we* do today to continue it?

Below I will make some comments about the nature of the Tradition in the context of discussing, briefly, Jesus’s role in it, then note the fact that Christianity represents a pseudo-continuation of that Tradition—without, though, repeating what scholars such as Barrie Wilson⁵⁷⁸ have stated regarding the matter. After then expressing my views on how the Tradition should be conceived today, I devote the bulk of this essay to the presentation of a proposal. That proposal is somewhat unusual in that it does not refer to any particular course of action other than the establishment of an *institution*. The significance of that institution, however, is that I believe that participation in it will have consequences for the participants and for our society (and other societies), all of which are consistence with furtherance of the Tradition.

Jesus and The Tradition

1. Jesus’s biography first becomes of interest when, as a young adult, he began to learn the contents of Hebrew Scripture, and began to reach certain conclusions:
 - a. God is displeased with a situation of human inequality because it means that some are living a lifestyle of excess, others one of insufficiency.
 - b. God issued directives to the society’s elite which, when acted upon, would tend to reduce that inequality—or at least result in the amelioration of its effects.
 - c. God had attempted to *motivate* the elite to obey His directives by letting them know that the Hebrews had a contract with God (drawn up by God!): God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and it was now their (specifically the elite’s) turn to reciprocate—by following God’s directives.
2. Having reached these conclusions, Jesus came to perceive that the religious leaders of his society were not representing the Tradition—as presented in Hebrew Scripture—well. In fact, they were turning it on its head: rather than teaching a “help the victim” ethic, they were teaching a “blame the victim” *non*-ethic.

⁵⁷⁸ *How Jesus Became Christian*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008.

3. Therefore, Jesus felt compelled to combat this blasphemy by initiating a “ministry” that would be consistent with the Tradition. In doing so, he often used the parable as a vehicle for communication.
4. His use of the parable may have been done to protect *himself* from charges of blasphemy by the religious leaders of his society. Also, however, Jesus used the parable because a parable is a sort of puzzle—and therefore invites thought and discussion with others as to its possible meaning(s).
5. Jesus borrowed from John the Baptizer (who may have been an Essene, besides being his cousin) the (apocalyptic) claim that God would “soon” descend to earth (Jerusalem, specifically) to separate the sheep from the goats (i.e., those who recognized, accepted, and followed God’s laws, and those who didn’t)—and began to preach it. Jesus may have adopted this belief because he sincerely accepted it as true—or (unconsciously) as a means to motivate the elite to recognize, accept, and follow God’s law.
6. His preaching was also, of course, directed at the religious leaders of his society, in the hope that they, too, would recognize that they were preaching a false doctrine (that was comforting to the elite)—and begin, rather, to teach God’s *True* law.
7. Although Jesus tended to speak in parables, there was enough sly—and not so sly—criticism of the religious leaders of the society (his Good Samaritan parable being a good example) that they came to see Jesus as a threat.
8. They therefore convinced the Roman authorities that Jesus posed a threat to *them*, convinced them—resulting in the Roman authorities arresting Jesus, “trying” him, and then executing him—by crucifixion.

A. After Jesus: Some Brief Comments⁵⁷⁹

Given the above interpretation of Jesus’s life, the significance I perceive in it is that Jesus came to recognize *that* a certain Tradition had been established in Israel, *what* its nature was, *that* the religious leaders of his society were propounding an inverted—and therefore *perverted*—version of the Tradition, so that it was necessary for someone to “set things right.” He came to know John the Baptizer (who was perhaps his cousin), and perceived John as “on the right track”—but insufficiently effective (especially after being beheaded!). With John dead, and therefore not providing Jesus with an excuse for not doing more himself, Jesus felt not only obligated to initiate his own “ministry,” but “up for the job”—and therefore began a “ministry.”

We should recognize that just as the religious leaders in Jesus’s society had turned the Tradition on its head, so has Christianity sinned in its own way. It has taken a member of the Tradition—Jesus—and invented a “biography” for him that makes him extremely “unTraditional.” A biography, rather, that makes him suspiciously like a “savior” of one of the Mystery cults that

⁵⁷⁹ If you come to conclude that I am being offensive in this section, I would remind you that Paul (1 Corinthians 14:20) admonished us to “be grown up in your thinking.” Just because I present unconventional views in this section it does not follow that my skepticism extends to the point that I am not a theist. Regarding *that*, I should perhaps note that theists come in many stripes!

were popular throughout the Mediterranean Basin in Jesus's time. This "conversion" of Jesus may have been initiated by Paul of Tarsus; if it didn't begin with Paul, it is relatively certain that this conversion was "pushed" by Paul—so that Christianity became a "paganized" variety of Judaism without, however, much of a relationship to its supposed parent. I might add that although purists may highly disturbed over the fact that this transformation occurred, we can be happy that it did; for had it not, the Jesus movements that came into being after Jesus's death likely would have—all of them—"petered out" within a few centuries. Had that happened, it is likely that Jesus would be a virtual unknown today.

Although the book of Acts may suggest otherwise, scholars know that *several* Jesus movements arose after Jesus's death, not just one. Of these movements, the Ebionites evidently carried forth Jesus's ministry most authentically.⁵⁸⁰ And were eventually declared to be "heretics" (!) by the particular Jesus movement that became dominant in the fourth century CE. Became dominant, it is necessary to, add, not because of its greater authenticity relative to other Jesus movements, but because Emperor Constantine, in his Edict of Milan (of 313 CE),⁵⁸¹ made that particular "denomination" the official bearer of orthodoxy. The mere fact that this movement's focus was on orthodoxy—i.e., correct *belief*—establishes it as unrelated to Jesus's ministry. And so, as someone has said, the religion *of* Jesus became, with Christianity, a (mere) religion *about* Jesus—with proper *belief* becoming central rather than proper *behavior*. This is not to say that Christianity has ignored the question of "proper" behavior; its emphasis, however, has tended to be on *discouraging* certain behaviors (i.e., vices) rather than on *encouraging* the sorts of behaviors associated with, e.g., Jesus in the (canonical) gospels. What's ironic here is that although in Matthew 25 Jesus is quoted as stating that one should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc.—and these directives are clearly part of a "plan of salvation" (from an afterlife in a very miserable place)—this passage tends to given little attention by Christians—whether or not they are clergy.

Despite the fact that the Tradition has not been carried forward—or even continued—by Christianity to any significant extent, this does not mean that the Tradition died centuries ago. It has been kept alive by those who have worked to reduce ill-being in their neighborhoods and the world; who have worked for legislation (for civil rights, to eliminate slavery, etc.); who have acted as societal critics; who have written "utopian" novels; who have created "intentional communities" for the purpose of contributing to the general welfare; etc. Most of these sorts of efforts have, however, been engaged in by people acting as individuals or as members of private (but "religious") organizations. It is time, I believe, to give the Tradition a religious component once more. Not that it doesn't already have a religious component—e.g., the Catholic Workers come to mind, as well as social service agencies connected to the Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, etc., denominations. But it needs a stronger religious component, and I hope that the proposal that I offer below will make a contribution in that regard.

580 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 253.

581 Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1959, p. 17.

The need for Tradition people today is as great as it always has been;⁵⁸² indeed, today not only is there a tremendous amount of misery in the world, there is a new sort of concern for Tradition people—the possibility that the very existence of many of God’s creatures—including us!—is threatened by “global warming.” Therefore, the challenges facing Tradition people today are greater than they have ever been.

B. Goals for Today

The proposal that I offer below is that of creating, and “operating,” an institution—one that is a sort of discussion group. I refer to the institution as a *Structured Interaction Group* (or SIG), and should state at the outset that my inspiration for the SIG comes especially from three Biblical passages (the quotations coming from my *Good News Bible*, 1976 edition):

Job 29:12 - 17:

When the poor cried out, I helped them.

I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.

Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and

I helped widows find security.

I have always acted justly and fairly.

I was eyes for the blind,

and feet for the lame.

I was like a father to the poor

and took the side of strangers in trouble.

I destroyed the power of cruel men

and rescued their victims.

Matthew 25:31 - 45, a portion of which is (vs. 35, 36):

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.

⁵⁸² My use of the word “always” here may be in error, for many anthropologists and archeologists believe that life before the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago was in many respects much better than it is for most of the world’s population today. See, e.g., Michael Finkel, “The Hazda,” *National Geographic*, Vol. 216, no. 5 (December 2009), pp. 94-119.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27:

Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! As it is, there are many parts but one body.

So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Nor can the head say to the feet, "Well, I don't need you!" On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker, and those parts that we think aren't worth very much are the ones which we treat with greater care; while the parts of the body which don't look very nice are treated with special modesty, which the more beautiful parts do not need. God himself has put the body together in such a way as to give greater honor to those parts that need it. And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.

All of you are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

I see the SIG as a discussion group (whose "structuring" is discussed shortly) that has a societal orientation. Its goal is to develop ideas, communicate those ideas, and even act on them, where appropriate. What makes it a *religious* group is that its members not only have thought processes shaped by passages such as the above quoted ones, but look to the Holy Spirit for guidance. In John's gospel, there are references to a "Helper" in 14:15, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7. This "Helper" (identified as the Holy Spirit in 14:26) is one promised to us by Jesus himself, to help us develop good ideas, and help us act as we should.

What should we want for our society, thus what sorts of ideas should we want to emerge from SIG discussions? I will list several:

- The "feeling" associated with the Christmas season—referred to in the Elvis Presley song quoted at the beginning—is something that we should like to have present throughout the year. However, because one can have such a feeling as a result of engaging in behaviors of a negative nature, it is also important that we desire a society within which positive personal traits are commonplace.
- What specific sorts of such traits? The following list is a fairly comprehensive one: kind/compassionate; helpful/generous; in touch with one's emotions, and empathetic relative to the feelings of others; friendly; respectful/considerate; tolerant/non-

judgmental; open-minded; forgiving; cooperative (by which I do not mean *obedient*!); gracious; courteous; honest; impartial/fair; trustworthy; humble, but with self-confidence; authentic; with a sense of humor; dependable/loyal; faithful in one's relationships with others; willing to engage others in meaningful conversations with others; willing to provide encouragement and direction to others; willing to transmit knowledge/skills to others; energetic, but also able to relax; courageous/having determination; prudent; curious; and creative.

- The society would be such that there would be an effort made to identify the talents of all members, and to facilitate the development of those talents. Individuals differ one from another, of course, in the *kinds* of talents they have, and in the *degree* to which they have some given talent. There would be a societal goal, however, to ensure that every member is regarded as the equal of everyone else in worth, so that an effort would be made to ensure that each person's talents would be developed to the maximum possible.
- The society would recognize that some members have not been particularly blessed with talents, but can have value to the society in other ways—such as the development of knowledge. Thus, such individuals should be encouraged to engage in reading and research, so that they might develop their knowledge—and perhaps develop a high level of wisdom as well.
- The attitude should be encouraged that the purpose in developing one's talents, knowledge, etc., is not self-aggrandizement. Rather, it is to use one's talents or knowledge, etc., for the benefit of others in one's society. One will quite naturally want to “do” for members of one's own family; but one must learn to go beyond family boundaries—the boundary of biological relationships—and want to “do” for others as well. In doing so, one will learn that one will not only add to the well-being of others, but will further hone one's talents (and even develop new skills) and gain a sense of potency (a concept important in the psychology of Rollo May)—thereby adding to one's own sense of well-being.

It should be obvious in today's society the *economic firm* is given priority over *people*—which may be why Philip E. Slater noted, several years ago, that “our society was not designed for people.”⁵⁸³ Our society is structured so that one is virtually forced to develop knowledge and skills that firms want in their employees. As a consequence, people too often develop knowledge and skills that they will need for getting a job rather than developing according to their natural “bent.” The claim is made that a division of labor is for the benefit of others; but although it *can* be, there is no reason to believe that the sort of division of labor that exists now in our society benefits others than the societal elite.

Ironically, despite the fact that our society does not reward an other-orientation, psychologist Bernard Rimland, in a famous study, found that people who were labeled

⁵⁸³ *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 92.

happy by members in his study group were also labeled unselfish.⁵⁸⁴ Thus, although supposedly one gains happiness by giving primary attention to “Number 1” (isn’t that what Economics teaches?)—relevant *empirical* research provides no support whatsoever to this “priceless pearl of worldly wisdom.” It is heartening to know that although the dominant values in our society currently are *materialism* (i.e., placing importance especially on material things—new such things in particular), *greed* (i.e., wanting to acquire as much in the way of things as one can), *aggressiveness* (using whatever means that are legal to acquire, regardless of how odious they are), and *selfishness* (i.e., being unwilling to give to others, or otherwise render help to others), there are many in our society who “go against the grain” of our value system. As a consequence, they are unlikely to become “successful;” they do, however, find some measure of satisfaction in their lives. Would that they could live in a society where their value system coincided with the society’s dominant value system!

I should add that the distorted value system of our present society may have its basis in a mentality of scarcity.⁵⁸⁵ Insofar as that is the case, it is important for us to discover *why* such a mentality exists, so that we can work at changing the conditions that give rise to the mentality.

- Finally, a topic to which we need to give attention is how to address the “global warming” problem. Shall we focus on reducing the use of (polluting) fossil fuels by developing substitute fuels that are less polluting, by decreasing the need for fossil fuels (e.g., by reducing both production and transportation), or by pursuing both possibilities?

The Structured Interaction Group would be unique, then, in that it is specifically oriented to reshaping our society, thereby becoming a part of the Tradition that has Job, Jesus, and Paul as members. It would also be part of the Tradition in the sense that its members would explicitly look to God—in the form of the Helper that Jesus said he was leaving with us, after his departure—for ideas regarding what to do and how, and for the means to implement those ideas. The SIG is a discussion group with rules—but *not* Robert’s Rules of Order—which is why I refer to it as a *Structured Interaction Group* (or *SIG*). Next, then, let us discuss that institution—including the rules associated with it—in some detail.

C. The SIG: Introduction

What is a Structured Interaction Group? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

⁵⁸⁴ “The Altruism Paradox,” *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 51 (1982), p. 522. Rimland was director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research.

⁵⁸⁵ Slater (*op. cit.*, p.83) has noted that “although we live in the most affluent society ever known, the sense of deprivation and discomfort that pervades it is also unparalleled.”

Participants in a given SIG meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”⁵⁸⁶); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random⁵⁸⁷) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one SIG session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a SIG is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation⁵⁸⁸ were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four SIG sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first SIG, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random procedure. This means not only that participants in a SIG do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense).⁵⁸⁹ Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The SIG, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels

⁵⁸⁶The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

⁵⁸⁷Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

⁵⁸⁸I recommend that SIG sessions *not* be restricted to members of the particular congregation involved—that, indeed, an effort be made to bring “neighbors” into the group—to increase the degree of diversity of participants.

⁵⁸⁹See, e.g., writings by Michael Parenti and G. William Domhoff.

genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a SIG all accept Jesus’s love of the neighbor command as their central “creed,” the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to that creed.⁵⁹⁰

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity.⁵⁹¹ It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop”⁵⁹² passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet’s immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

D. Guiding Principles⁵⁹³

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during SIG sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each

⁵⁹⁰I am reminded here of Matthew Fox’s statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. (*Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 (“Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey”).

⁵⁹¹In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to SIG participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his *Coming Home to the Pleistocene* (Washington, DC: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 1998). For example, Shepard states (p. 155): “Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself.” Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have “designed” us for such an activity.

⁵⁹²Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus symbolizing well the goal of a SIG to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, *Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

⁵⁹³Compare with Paul’s comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept the truism that one person's views are as worth of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.

- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one’s truth”⁵⁹⁴ and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
- d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given SIG will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will

⁵⁹⁴This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a “talking hoop” (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Structured Discussion Group are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the SIG, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the SIG is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the SIG has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.⁵⁹⁵

E. Possible Consequences of SIG Participation

George Edgin Pugh, in his important *The Biological Origin of Human Values*,⁵⁹⁶ discusses “instinctive human motives” (pp. 284 – 87), and among them lists an enjoyment of conversation.⁵⁹⁷ The Structured Discussion Group (SIG) implicitly recognizes this as an

⁵⁹⁵One with a scientific background might say that the SIG represents an “operationalization”—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

⁵⁹⁶New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977.

⁵⁹⁷His complete list: (1) a desire for dominance (rivalry), (2) a desire for approval, (3) a desire for social acceptance, (4) gregariousness, (5) the enjoyment of conversation, (6) an activity motive (a desire to exercise the body and develop physical skills), (7) the enjoyment of humor in conversation and play, (8) social preferences, (9) a team motive (a desire to work with others for common goals), (10) a constructive motive (a desire to make/build things), and (11) a contribution motive (a desire to contribute, to do something meaningful for one’s society). Pugh notes (p. 285) that “the proposed list of instinctive motives is sure to be controversial . . .,” but may only (partial) objection is to the first motive he lists—a desire for dominance. I would assert, rather, that individuals naturally vary in their position on a leader-follower continuum. The fact of this variation can—under certain circumstances—lead to some individuals, in acting on the motive, becoming autocrats. Yet, it is not inevitable that this occur. Although generally I see a tendency toward dominance in negative terms (and have designed the SIG to control the tendency, while also encouraging leadership tendencies in those more inclined to follow), I also recognize that any society needs both leaders and followers. In fact, if my SIG proposal is to “get off the ground,” some individuals with leadership qualities will need to “start the ball rolling”—and others who are more inclined to follow will need to perceive the value in the movement, and become a part of it as followers. There is, of course, a danger in those with followership tendencies to become too passive, submissive, and those with leadership abilities to recognize this tendency in others, and take advantage of it—by becoming autocratic. I believe, however, that SIG participation can

important motive (or *need*, if you prefer), and uses it as the basis for making the fulfillment of that need a vehicle for bringing about the Good Society—i.e., a society within which the positive individual traits listed above are not only commonplace, but are fostered by the society.

Participation in a SIG can have a great variety of consequences, and in this section I wish to identify and discuss possible kinds of consequences, under several headings. I identify only *positive* consequences because—frankly—I believe that only such consequences would result from SIG participation!

Possible consequences of SIG participation can be identified and discussed at three different “scales”: (1) implications for SIG participants—as individuals and as a group; (2) societal implications; and (3) implications for other societies. Each is discussed in turn, but first some introductory comments.

Let me begin by asserting that if there is magic in ritual,⁵⁹⁸ then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture.”⁵⁹⁹ The “magic” in a SIG, it seems to me, lies in one’s being aware of the possible consequences associated with participation in a SIG. That is, if one knows in advance what sorts of consequences participation in a SIG may have, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one’s thinking and behavior, *foreknowledge* of possible consequences of participation can also impact one’s thinking and behavior.

I find it interesting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher Max C. Otto,⁶⁰⁰ in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that

foster the development of “habits of thought and action” such that these “natural” tendencies become suppressed—at least to the point that they do not pose a threat to the society.

⁵⁹⁸Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991.

⁵⁹⁹Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899. In actuality, however, institutions should *not* be regarded as “furniture”—as things that are “just there.” For a central assumption of this essay is that institutions play a highly significant role in *shaping* thoughts and action. If I did not believe this, I would not be proposing the creations of SIGs!

⁶⁰⁰*The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life*. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V (“Realistic Idealism,” pp. 128 - 53).

such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the SIG, because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in SIG sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a SIG fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

1. *Implications for Participants*

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a SIG would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a SIG, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the SIG in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a SIG proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the SIG—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the SIG's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a SIG as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a SIG—the individual “crazinesses” will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.”⁶⁰¹ (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Precisely *because* I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from SIG sessions, I believe that there will be *sociological* implications for participants. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and

⁶⁰¹See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, “Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy,” in *Modern Therapies*, edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the SIG has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the SIG’s design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the SIG is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a SIG can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking one’s mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one’s interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one’s claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control⁶⁰² others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies⁶⁰³ may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a SIG will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the SIG as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will

⁶⁰²They may perceive this as exercising “leadership,” rather. That is, they may put a positive “spin” on their objectionable behavior.

⁶⁰³For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

experience improvement in their physical,⁶⁰⁴ emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the SIG experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.⁶⁰⁵ And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective⁶⁰⁶) blasphemous.

Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.⁶⁰⁷ On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit;

⁶⁰⁴Including psychosomatic ones. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, *Man’s Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

⁶⁰⁵Few Christians seem to understand the fact that “God” can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept see Daniel C. Maguire, “More People: Less Earth: The Shadow of Man-Kind,” in (pp. 1 - 63) *Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four (“God: The Heart of Reality”) in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

⁶⁰⁶See Raymond Panikkar, “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

⁶⁰⁷Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and the movie *Groundhog Day* (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are *systems*, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the

and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity “out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being,). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as *also* constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Despite the fact that participation in a SIG likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a SIG will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked”⁶⁰⁸ Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a SIG can one experience Deity in our society,⁶⁰⁹ I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience.”⁶¹⁰ A SIG, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a SIG can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the SIG. If SIGs involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to

society and the dominant value system associated with those “peopling” the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, but this is not the place to present that strategy.

608“The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

609L. Robert Keck has introduced “meditative prayer” as an alternate “path to the Spirit.” See his *The Spirit of Synergy: God’s Power and You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his Chapter 7 (“Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime”), refers (p. 125) to “the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about,” and (p. 126) “hitting the wall” in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

610Marraine C. Kettell, “Becoming Ourselves,” a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

humankind's survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind's very existence is currently being threatened by "global warming," among other factors.⁶¹¹

2. *Societal Implications*

The reference here is specifically to *our* society, the following subsection making a few comments on implications beyond our borders. The reference to "global warming" in the previous paragraph should perhaps be included in this subsection; but as its reference is to humankind, and uses a term—"salvation"—more commonly used in discussing individuals than humankind in general, I thought it more "natural" to place it where I did.

Given that my primary concern herein is with the Good Society—which I am defining as a society within which various positive personal traits are commonplace, and which fosters the development and retention of such traits—the first point to make here is that I foresee that among the ideas generated during SIG sessions will be ideas regarding how to change the "shape" of the society so that it will "produce" and value members who have the personal qualities listed earlier. Individuals vary, of course, in their genetic endowment and in their experiences (etc.)—meaning that some members of the Good Society will possess positive traits to a greater degree than others. But even with a given member there will be variation *over time* in the degree to which one possesses any given positive trait: even the best of us will feel anger, envy, etc., and be rude, presumptuous, etc. at some time.

Insofar as there is a proliferation of SIGs within the society, those associated with them have the best chance of acquiring positive traits, and as habits. But other mechanisms/institutions might also come to be created that also have such an effect. I have already mentioned the small eco-community⁶¹² as an institution that might help address the "global warming" problem, among other problems. I would add here that the mere fact of living in such a community might also so contribute. I hesitate go beyond what I have already stated on the subject, given that I expect SIGs to generate creative ideas—and that it is impossible to predict in advance what shape they might take.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there are likely to be changes in the governmental structure of the society, so let me briefly comment on possible changes in that realm. One change that I would anticipate would be the elimination of bicameral legislatures—a change that would be made difficult because involving constitutional change, but a sort of change that is at least conceivable (especially if a society is a Good Society, as I have defined it). At present, only the state of Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, and I am not aware that Nebraskans regard that as a problem. Given this, why not rid our society of the U. S. Senate and

⁶¹¹See, e.g., Tom Flannery, *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

⁶¹²I especially have in mind cooperative eco-communities (CECs), but should also mention Ecological Company Towns (ECTs)—the former involving community ownership of all real property, the latter such ownership by an individual or firm. A "plus" associated with both from a "global warming" standpoint is that they would eliminate the need for journey-to-work trips involving the use of an automobile. Rather, one could simply either walk or bike to the place of employment.

all other “upper” legislative chambers? Bicameral legislatures were created in the first place to block democratic decision-making—and perhaps are appropriate for societies within which the positive personal traits listed earlier are not common. Their purpose, however, would be non-existent in the Good Society, so that their existence would only serve to make governmental decision-making cumbersome—and more expensive than it would need to be.

Assuming this sort of change, an additional sort of change that is recommended is to change how legislators—often called “representatives,” without good reason!—are selected. Currently, they are commonly selected from electoral districts or are elected “at large.” The former method is subject to “gerrymandering” (an issue addressed by the Supreme Court especially in the 1960s), and neither method will ensure a “replica of the realm” legislature (or “portrait in miniature,” to use John Adams’s terminology). Existing methods of selecting legislators should be replaced with some sort of “proportional representation” system—such as the “list” system (in which case one votes for a “party”—which develops a list of candidates, and lists individuals in order of the party’s judgment as to qualifications), which produces a “representative” (in a statistical sense) assembly in that seats are awarded in proportion to number of votes received by party.

Related to these changes of an institutional nature, there would be a disappearance—one would hope!—of the lobbyist as an “institution”! This change might not please lobbyists, but because there would be a reduction in firms and other organizations wanting to hire lobbyists, there would be little demand for such people—so that people having this employment would be forced to seek employment elsewhere.

As the Good Society is in the process of being created, there also would be changes—significant ones, most likely—in the society’s economy, so that it is also advisable to comment on anticipated changes in that realm. I foresee two changes as of especial importance—these having a variety of implications, some of which I will mention below. First, the *per-capita* consumption of goods is likely to be reduced substantially. Second, “production for use” is likely to become more common than it is now.

Recently, during a church service, we were handed a card with the following quotation from Adam Hamilton’s *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity*:613

Lord, help me
to be grateful for what I have,
to remember that I don’t need most of what I want,
and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.

As my discussion above suggests, I agree entirely with this statement, but would add that I regard it as rather incomplete. (But, then, a small card will not accommodate many words!) Most importantly, I would add that anyone who comes to recognize that s/he doesn’t really need most of what s/he has will then—logically—give that excess to those who *can* make use of it (or

613 Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.

simply discard that portion that would not be needed by anyone), and change future buying habits. This changed purchasing behavior may be combined with a desire to oneself produce for at least some of one's needs (e.g., by engaging in gardening, building one's own furniture, etc.), and insofar as these changes occur, the implications for the economy can be considerable. Given that many goods currently consumed would no longer be purchased:

- Many production facilities in this country would be forced to close down.
- Many goods currently imported would no longer be.
- Many retail stores selling such goods would be forced to close.

Such changes would likely result in many people moving from larger cities to smaller ones—or to eco-communities or rural areas.

The fact that the number of work and shopping trips would decline greatly would mean that automobile (and automobile parts) production-importation would be reduced, as would be the number of automotive service stations, and automotive repair shops. Petroleum refineries would also be forced to shut down—but there likely would be the development of facilities for producing biofuels (from algae, e.g.).

Insofar as structures would continue to be built,⁶¹⁴ they likely would be built to be energy-efficient and less subject to deterioration over time. Therefore, there would be a shift in the production of materials used, and less new building during a given year.

Although work- and shopping-related movement might be reduced substantially, I would expect a significant increase in travel for sightseeing purposes—trips to experience natural features such as the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Devil's Tower, etc., and also trips to visit historical sites such as restored Shaker communities, the Washington monument, Gettysburg, etc.

A final point that I would like to mention in this subsection is that insofar as positive personal traits such as the ones listed above become commonplace, there would be little need for police officers, lawyers, judges, prison officials-guards, etc., so that those professions would basically disappear.

Note that I have been referring to the disappearance of many jobs/professions as a “natural” accompaniment to the development of the Good Society, and a question likely to arise is: What will these unemployed people then do?! One suggestion I will offer here is: Create an eco-community for yourself and others, or move to one already existing! What I am hoping is that enterprising individuals—whether or not unemployed—will step forth to create a new sort of

⁶¹⁴ Likely there would be less construction activity because the economy would become less “dynamic”: there would be less economic activity, less growth in such activity, less internal migration in response to economic shifts of a geographic nature, etc. For discussions of the virtues of, and prospects for, a non-growth economy see, e.g., Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 (second edition); and Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*. Sustainable Development Commission, n.d.

Available at: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity_without_growth_report.pdf

capitalistic society! Michael Moore's recent movie *Capitalism* suggests that capitalism is inherently an evil sort of economic system. Michael, please read this paper; you may change your mind!

3. *Implications for Other Societies*

I will be very brief here. Movement, within our society, in a Good Society direction will mean that more and more of our fellows will develop positive personal traits. In acting on those traits they will act not only to make our society a better place to live, but will do the same for other societies. In doing so, I would only caution them to be sensitive of cultural differences that exist between other societies and ours so that we will refrain from doing unintentional damage to the fabric of other societies.

F. Conclusions

The intended audience for this paper is clergy and church lay leaders. I anticipate that such individuals who find merit in the proposal I offer herein would use this paper as a resource for writing *their own* papers (along with announcements, advertisements, etc.). In doing so, I would expect them to write papers (etc.) that would reflect their particular theological views, and would emphasize points that *they* deemed as of especial importance. Finally, I would expect that whatever literature they write, it would not be as burdened with footnotes as the paper in front of you!

Should you choose to act on my proposal here, you are not under any obligation—it goes without saying—to refer to the discussions groups involved as Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs). I have, myself, in writing about the concept over the years, used different terminology—such as Kingdom of God Fellowship (suggesting that the kingship of God occurs when individuals follow God's Word—obtained via revelation in this case), Seminoar (the “oar” here alluding to a Viking spirit of adventure—my ethnic heritage being Norwegian and Swedish), and New Word Fellowship (the “new word” alluding to revealed truth, obtained via continuing revelation of the sort believed in by Quakers⁶¹⁵).

Unless one lives in a cave, one is fully aware of the fact that we are living in dangerous times—with not only the threat from thermonuclear weapons, but also “global warming.” Personally, I view the latter as our most serious threat because it appears that we are marching inexorably toward oblivion: Scientist James Lovelock predicted recently that he expects our species (along with many other ones, of course) to be close to extinction by 2100 CE, and I have a great deal of respect for his views (regarding “global warming,” at any rate). A “technological fix” sort of solution to this problem (such as being advocated by “geo-engineers”) runs the risk of having unpredictable side effects that might be worse than “global warming” itself. And a switchover to alternate (non-polluting) energy sources will be difficult given the influence of vested interests in continued fossil fuel use. Besides, such a switchover—if it could be accomplished soon—would address the “global warming” problem while allowing all of our other problems to continue, and even worsen.

615 A friend and I attended a local Quaker service together a number of years ago.

Although I am not a Quaker, I am a firm believer in continuing revelation—which is why I place so much faith in the SIG as a vehicle for ushering in the Good Society. We humans have been creating our own “flood” over the past 250 years (ever since the Agricultural Revolution, in fact?), so that if we manage to destroy ourselves (and many others of God’s creatures) through our arrogance and foolishness, we will be committing the most terrible kind of blasphemy.

Rather than continuing in our errant ways, why don’t we wake up and take heed of Jesus’s promise of leaving us with a Helper. I was raised by parents, who themselves had been raised in a Norwegian Lutheran church, but with others helped build an Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, Wisconsin. Although I long ago drifted away from that denomination, I recall with fondness having black missionaries from Africa visiting our church, singing “Jesus Loves the Little Children” with the other children in the congregation—and learning the truth that there *is* a Holy Spirit. I perceive the Structured Interaction Group as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit speaking to us today—and would even go so far as to claim that the *idea* for the SIG was granted to me by the Holy Spirit.

The SIG may not be the only answer (indirect and direct) to our problems as Americans and as humans. I am convinced, however, that it *can* be a significant answer. However, it is an idea that will gain life only if clergy and church lay leaders embrace it, and act on it. Amen (i.e., may it be so).

I have suggested that clergy should assume the responsibility of providing leadership for the “movement” that I have advocated herein, and the question arises: Why “pick on” clergy by placing a mantle of leadership on them? Several reasons can be mentioned:

- There would be, it should be obvious, difficulties in initiating the “program” that I have been proposing herein. An advantage offered by churches (and synagogues, etc.) is that many in our society are in the habit of attending religious services on Saturdays or Sundays, so that the creation of SIG sessions associated with religious institutions would be able to draw upon this habit. Many churches have already introduced “alternate” services, and a SIG could be regarded as a type of such service, or could be introduced as a supplement to whatever services a given church/synagogue already had.
- A movement to bring about societal system change—with SIGs leading the way—would, of course, be a “subversive” movement; a movement that would use peaceful means, but have a subversive intent. As such, it would run the risk of being sabotaged, or even destroyed, by the society’s elite. However, a movement for societal system change “housed” in religious institutions might be able to avoid the elite’s attention. Even if members of the elite *did* become aware of a SIG movement, they might be reluctant to attack it given its religious nature and the religious freedom prized in our society.
- In recent years there has been a rise of “neoliberalism”⁶¹⁶—usually regarded as a conservative philosophy!—and so regarded because its fixation on “free markets” and the claim that governments can only “interfere” in the economy. (The “philosophy” has its basis in ideas presented by Adam Smith in his famous 1776 *The Wealth of Nations*, but

⁶¹⁶ See, e.g., David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

“radicalizes” Smith’s ideas.) Ironically, in that my proposal is based on people acting as *private* individuals (but does not view government as an evil), it can be construed as a “neoliberal” one. This means that if members of the elite (or its lackeys) become aware of a SIG movement, it is likely to perplex them: its *intent* would be to bring about societal system change (which they would not want, given that they are parasites within the Existing Order), yet its *means* would be capitalistic in being of a “free market” variety! In being perplexed by the movement—given that logically they can have no objections to it!—they might not know how to respond, and therefore *not* respond. Perhaps some would even join the movement—and become significant assets to the movement.

- The churches have much to atone for (as the brief discussion of Joe Hill on the cover suggests). Not only have the churches been ignoring the basic “thrust” of the Bible—its orientation to “right behavior,” behavior that, if it were to become widespread, would help usher in the Good Society. By inventing the term “social gospel” they have given the false impression that there is a “social” gospel and then there is a “real” *other* gospel: there is only *one* gospel, and it *is* a social gospel! By having an orientation to the afterlife (less true today than in the past), they have tended to ignore the “commandments” of Matthew 25 (i.e., feed the hungry, etc.); they have even somehow managed to not recognize the obvious fact that the Matthew 25 passage presents a *plan of salvation*: if one fails to heed its injunctions, one runs the risk of spending eternity in a very warm—and otherwise unpleasant—place.

If the above isn’t reason enough to give the churches an opportunity to redeem themselves, there is the fact that too often the churches have played a societal role that has been not merely unBiblical, but *anti*-Biblical. One should expect, then, that the clergy would be anxious to “get on” with the business of implementing the proposal presented herein.

By giving clergy a leadership position in the movement I do not mean to suggest that non-clergy should not also become involved in the movement. After all, private associations have a long history in our country, so that becoming involved in a SIG movement would be a very American thing to do—whether or not one is a clergy person. In fact, the more people who are involved in the movement, the greater the chances of its success.

Continuing the Tradition: Proposal

by

Alton C. Thompson

December 1, 2009

Prefatory Remarks

For a number of years I have been struggling to develop, and then express, some ideas, but have had difficulty becoming satisfied with the results. However, a little over two years ago I was able to develop some of them well enough that Bruce Robinson posted my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” (under the pen name James B. Gray) on his www.religioustolerance.org web site. Since then I have become dissatisfied with parts of that paper, but have been unable to re-fashion it to my satisfaction. Then yesterday my friend Keith Doman called me at work, and during the course of our conversation mentioned that he had “A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash” from the library, had watched it, and was impressed. I suggested that he come to my home that night so that we could watch the documentary together, he did—and this afternoon my reflections on the film resulted in some thoughts on how to present my ideas in a manner that I might find more satisfactory—the result being this paper (which, though, has gone through a number of iterations). Many of the ideas presented in this paper received their initial formulation in the “Worship” paper. The current paper, however, not only differs from “Worship” in its “thrust,” but contains no footnotes.

I should note that insofar as there are inconsistencies between this paper and “Worship” (and there are!)m this can be explained by Napoleon’s statement that “You commit yourself, and then you see.” I interpret this to mean that if one has some ideas that are amorously developed, one should nevertheless commit them to paper as well as one can. With the passage of time one will begin to see more clearly that that writing does not express well what has on one’s mind, and then, at some later point, be able to more perfectly express one’s ideas. But what helped this clarification to occur is that one had attempted to commit one’s ideas to paper at an earlier point in time.

Please note that all Biblical quotations herein are from my (curiously-titled) Good News Bible, dated 1976.

[I guess that I should dedicate this paper to my friend Keith. Had he not called me on November 30, I would not have been able to write this paper as I did!]

Continuing the Tradition: A Proposal

On November 28 I watched—for the first time—the *CNN Heroes* awards program, and learned of the abundant misery in our world (being addressed to a degree, however, by some individuals deserving our admiration). Then last night I watched, with a friend, “A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash,” and learned that we humans are at (or near—or perhaps even past) the “peak oil” point (a term introduced by M. King Hubbert a half century ago).

Given (regarding the latter point) that the *demand* for oil will continue to increase—as the world’s population grows, and “modernization” continues apace—the *price* of oil will necessarily increase. An increase in price will, of course, help to spur further oil production—but oil is a non-renewable resource, there are technological limits to how much oil the world can produce on an annual basis (from petroleum and other sources—such as oil tar sands), and it is extremely unlikely that any new oil reserves (and other sources), of consequence, will ever be discovered. Thus, the production trend must be downward. (See the Appendix for a fuller discussion.) What these facts portend, of course, is increased misery here and elsewhere—not even considering the misery that can be expected to result as “global warming” continues.

Until about 200 years ago, sunlight was the primary source—directly and indirectly—of energy for humans. It provided the energy needed for the growth of edible plants and other vegetation (water being the other resource needed); vegetation provided food for animals; animals (and slaves) provided us (exclusive of animals as a source of food) with energy; and the sun was the ultimate source of energy for water wheels (providing an energy source for, e.g., grist and saw mills) and sailing ships. Prior to about 200 years ago, then, virtually all of the energy used by humans had the sun as its ultimate source.

Today, however, this is no longer true. Today’s societies—especially the “advanced” ones—were all enabled to develop, first via the use of coal and, more recently, oil. As a result, they have become *extremely* dependent on oil: For producing food (manufacturing and operating tractors and other machinery, and for making fertilizers and pesticides); for producing manufactured goods; for transporting food and (other) manufactured goods; and as a “raw material” for many products (plastics, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, etc.). In short, if oil were suddenly to become increasingly expensive, our world—and especially the “developed” part of it—would quickly descend into chaos: violence (private and governmental) would become commonplace; starvation would become rampant; disease would become a severe problem; etc. The people who would have the best chance of surviving intact would be the few remaining hunter-gatherer groups (such as the Hadza described in the current issue of *National Geographic*)—the members of which likely would be overjoyed at our disappearance, given their treatment, over the past few centuries, by Europeans and Americans!

One noted physicist, David L. Goodstein (who was one of those interviewed for “A Crude Awakening”), has predicted that “Civilization as we know it will come to an end some time in this century” (www.its.caltech.edu/~dg/Essay2.pdf) This occurring—per Prof. Goodstein—as a consequence of passing the “peak oil” point—set by some scientists as

occurring in 2010 (which begins in less than a month!). And for a different, but related, reason (that of “global warming”), another noted scientist, James Lovelock, has predicted (*The Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*, 2006, p. xiii) that “before this century is over, billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the arctic region where the climate remains tolerable.” Needless to say, the “global warming” alluded to by Dr. Lovelock is occurring especially because of our burning fossil fuels, including—most notably now—petroleum. Thus, the use (especially as a fuel) of petroleum is presenting problems for humans, as is the fact that its depletion will be playing havoc with our economies.

To say that we are living in a critical period of world history is an understatement indeed! Therefore, those of us who are parents and grandparents (I have three grandchildren) should be especially concerned with what the future has in store for us humans—unless drastic actions are taken soon to stave them off. (Assuming that disaster *can* be avoided, that is, even if we try our best to avoid it.) Scientists are busily working on the development of alternate (renewable and/or non-polluting) energy sources, true; but many scientists have doubts that such sources can be developed, and then deployed, in time to stave off disaster.

These facts and predictions have caused me to ask: Is there an avenue that could be pursued that might result in solutions that would help prevent the occurrence of the disasters resulting from passing the “peak oil” point and from global warming—while also addressing the *current* misery that exists around the world? An avenue which—in addition—would have a *Biblical* basis?

My answer is “Yes”—working for the creation and proliferation of an institution I call the “Kingship of God Fellowship,” using here the word “kingship” instead of “kingdom” in deference to those scholars who would argue that the meaning intended for the words usually translated as “Kingdom of God” is the *rulership* of God, not a *place* with geographical boundaries. With “rulership” here being understood as occurring when God’s will is being acted upon—that will being expressed especially via current revelation.

This “answer,” in turn, suggests the questions: How can the Bible be conceived such that the solution—actually a *means* rather than an end—that I offer could be viewed as Bible-based? And: What is the *nature* of a Kingship of God Fellowship (KGF)?

I would answer the first question by asserting that the Bible can be thought of as providing a record of a (developing) Tradition—one that should not, however, be thought of as having ended with “Bible times.” Not that this is the *only* way of conceiving the Bible, of course, but that it *is* a valid way. Given this possibility of viewing the Bible from a *Tradition* perspective, there is the possibility of arguing that the Kingship of God Fellowship can be thought of as a vehicle for *continuing* that Tradition. So that the KGF is Bible-based in that sense.

What I need to do in this essay, then, is to provide a description of the (Biblical) Tradition that I perceive, followed by clarification regarding the nature of the KGF. I would relate the KGF to the Biblical Tradition by first arguing that the Biblical Tradition is not something that should be put on display and admired; rather, it is something that should be learned, and then *entered*, and thereby *continued*. That “entering” will inevitably involve *development* of the Tradition; so that

although the “love the neighbor” command of the Bible is retained today, “neighbor” is expanded in meaning to include people who will be living in the future. That is, continuing the Tradition today involves not only loving the neighbor in the here-and-now, but working so that there *can* be a human future.

In a sense, I am asserting that we humans should attempt to “save” others and ourselves from catastrophe by establishing and “operating” KGFs—which assertion some might regard as (at least) bordering on blasphemy. I would remind such individuals, however, that the “directives” put into Jesus’s mouth in Matthew 25 (give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, etc.) constitute a “plan of salvation.” They inform us that our salvation is solely in *our* hands: If one *declines* to provide food to the hungry (etc.), one can expect to spend eternity in a rather unpleasant place! So that if one wishes to be “saved” from such an eternity, one had better take heed of *Jesus’s* words—rather than, e.g., the words found in a tract handed to you, by some well-meaning person, while you are waiting for the bus or train.

I should perhaps also note before proceeding that the KGF is a type of voluntary association—which has been an important institution in this country at least since the early 1800s. I believe that many problems in the here-and-now, as well as the problems of global warming and passing the “peak oil” point, can be addressed successfully by voluntary associations; that, in fact, it’s entirely conceivable that such problems can be *most* successfully addressed by such associations. The important problem of thermonuclear proliferation, however, is one that only national governments are equipped to address—which is why I “pass over” that problem in this essay.

The Biblical Tradition

As I perceive the Biblical Tradition, it has its basis—and origins—in the fact that in ancient Hebrew society a degree of inequality developed such that some particularly sensitive members of the society came to conclude that God was rather displeased with the situation. Why? The inegalitarian situation itself meant that a few members of the society had lives of excess, while most members had lives of insufficiency. Neither of these facts, these individuals sensed, was pleasing to God, but especially the latter one—because it meant ill-being, suffering on the part of those unable to have their basic needs met, and that, they concluded, was displeasing God. Who, after all, had placed the original humans in an Edenic situation.

Another implication of the society being inegalitarian was that the leaders were prone to engage in wars, meaning that many subjects were forced to participate in military engagements—and get killed or injured as a result. This meant that many in the society were acquiring the status of widows and orphans—who for that reason could not have a dignified life, and might not even be able to continue living. Which facts also displeased God, they reasoned.

These individuals realized that it was not realistic for the (then basically agricultural) society to revert to a simpler level (e.g., one in which gathering-hunting were practiced), so that the only way to reduce ill-being in the society was to convince members of the elite to tend to the well-being needs of their fellows. How to convince them? The starting point, the Bible suggests, was that God decided to work up a set of rules (“commandments”), make those rules known to Moses, and then have Moses communicate those rules to “the people”—members of the elite in particular.

My own upbringing in Christianity (which occurred long ago, as I'm now 69) was such that I had come to think of the "Law" in negative terms—as a "burden," and something which the coming of Jesus had made obsolete, in fact. However, when I began a serious reading of the books of the Pentateuch several years ago, I quickly came to realize how amazing they are. (The "Pentateuch" consists of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Judges.) How subtle are some of the laws therein contained! How sensitive to one's psychological need for maintaining a sense of self-respect are some of the laws—while, though, simultaneously addressing physical needs! How brilliantly the question of motivation is dealt with! Etc. In describing key elements of the Tradition, I therefore feel compelled to begin by noting some of the salient features of the Law presented in the Pentateuch. (I find it highly unfortunate that those of us raised in Christianity have learned the *stories* presented in the Pentateuch, but have skipped over the *Law*—except for the Ten Commandments.)

It will be useful to begin the discussion with what would appear to be the earliest version of the Ten Commandments found in the Bible. What I am referring to here is the version that appears in Exodus 34:12 - 26 (identified in Exodus 34:28 thusly: ". . . the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments," and preceded in v. 11 with these words: "Obey the laws that I am giving you [Moses directly] today. I will drive out the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, as you advance [toward the Promised Land]."):

1. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country into which you are going: this could be a fatal trap for you.
2. Tear down their altars, destroy their sacred pillars, and cut down their symbols of the goddess Asherah.
3. Do not worship any other god [for there *are* other gods].
4. Do not make any treaties with the people of the country [you are about to enter].
5. Do not make gods of metal and worship them.
6. Keep the Festival of Unleavened Bread.
7. Every first-born son and first-born domestic animal belongs to me.
8. No one is to appear before me without an offering.
9. Do not work on the seventh day, not even during plowing time or harvest.
10. Keep the Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters.
11. Three times a year all of your men must come to worship me.
12. Do not offer bread made with yeast when you sacrifice an animal to me.
13. Do not keep until the following morning any part of the animal killed at the Passover Festival.

14. Each year bring to the house of the LORD the first grain that you harvest.
15. Do not cook a young sheep or goat in its mother's milk.

Note here first that there are 14 “commandments” rather than 10 (given that 1 and 4 are virtually identical). And note, second, that none has any ethical content! All are of a purely *cultic* nature.

This version of the Ten Commandments evidently came into being at a time in Hebrew history when the tribes were small enough to be extended families. As such, sharing would have occurred as a *matter of course* and, as a consequence, there would have been no *need* for ethical laws. That is, *mores*—unwritten “laws”—existed in the society such that when neediness was observed, that neediness was automatically “ministered to” by fellow tribal members able so to do. Because the mores of the tribe “prescribed” much of their behavior, members of the tribe had no need for laws as *we* know them (i.e., written rules to govern—it is hoped, at least!—our behavior, especially as it relates, directly or indirectly, to other people).

As tribes expanded in size, however, not only did a breakdown of the mores occur; with their breakdown, people began to *neglect* those of their fellows with physical needs. Indeed, even the *exploitation* of one's fellows came to be common—thereby adding to whatever neediness already existed. The founders of the Tradition that was about to be created therefore came to realize that people needed a new set of laws, one that now focused, rather, on conduct of an *ethical* nature. The Bible therefore states that God then revealed (to Moses) a new set of Ten Commandments (this time actually including just ten!), and hoped that His people would follow them, given that He was their author. (Unfortunately, His people did *not* follow them “religiously”—which gave rise to the prophets.)

Why view the commands listed above as antecedent to the birth of the Tradition, given that they utterly lack in ethical content—i.e., are not in the least oriented to human well-being? Because *they attribute to God an attempt to influence the behavior of the Hebrew people*. (Note the concept of God as a mere king-like Being). When, later, laws of an *ethical* nature were given to Moses (in, e.g., the form of the familiar version of the Ten Commandments), they were related to the earlier, purely cultic, ones in that they were also commandments, and also from the same source—i.e., God.

The ethical laws/commands that *did* become associated with Hebrew society can be classified as follows. Note that although the commands of the familiar version of the Ten Commandments were directed at *all* Hebrews, the (lesser known) ones that I am about to discuss are directed specifically (if implicitly) at the society's “haves”—and have their basis in the fact that neediness existed in the society. In addition, it is important to note that a tacit assumption underlying these laws is that the needy were in that state through no fault of their own: they were needy because they were widows, their husbands having been killed in battle; they were needy because they were orphans, their parents having been killed; they were needy because they were poor, this resulting from losing their land, or becoming heavily indebted; bad weather, or an army stealing their crops/animals; strangers might very well be needy for the simple reason that they were away from home; etc. (We moderns need to keep this fact in mind, because it does not follow that because the needy in ancient Hebrew society were needy through no fault of their own, that that is necessarily true in *our* society today. However, given our tendency—as “good

Christians”—to “blame the victim”—for his laziness, bad habits, etc.—we moderns need to avoid our tendency to “blame the victim” in knee-jerk fashion, without any analysis of *why* someone is needy.)

I. Ameliorative

A. Direct

1. Injunctions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

2. Prohibitions

a. Abstract

b. Specific

B. Indirect (all of which are specific)

1. Injunctions

2. Prohibitions

II. Restorative

A. Abstract

B. Specific.

(Note: The “ameliorative” laws referred to below are ones that are oriented to existing situations; “restorative” ones, in contrast, have as their intention the restoration of a previously-existing situation. The actions demanded of commands can be either direct or indirect, and also may be either injunctions—i.e., commands to *do* something—or prohibitions—i.e., commands to *not* do something. Finally, commands can be thought of as varying in their degree of specificity—although it is not always easy to decide *where*, on the specific-abstract continuum, one should place a given command.)

Let us next, then, identify specific laws under the above headings:

1. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:9 - If a man buys a female slave for his son, he is to treat her like a daughter. (From our perspective today this is an abstract injunction, but in the context of ancient Hebrew society—a “high context” society—would not have been.)

- b. Leviticus 19:18 – Don’t take revenge, or hate; love your neighbor as you love yourself.
- c. Leviticus 19:32 - Respect the elderly [again, a law that would have had a more concrete meaning in ancient Israel than it has for us].
- d. Leviticus 25:35 - You must provide for a poor neighbor.
- e. Deuteronomy 5:16 - Respect your parents [also a law that would have had a more specific meaning for the ancient Hebrews].
- f. Deuteronomy 10:19 - Show love for foreigners—because *you* were once foreigners [i.e., in captivity in Egypt].

2. Specific Direct Ameliorative Injunctions

- a. Exodus 21:10 - If a man takes a second wife, he must continue to give the first wife the same amount of food and clothing, and the same rights.
- b. Exodus 22:26 - If you take a cloak as a pledge, give it back in the evening [for I am merciful, God says in the next verse].
- c. Deuteronomy 15:7 - 9 - If a fellow Israelite is in need, don’t be selfish; lend [don’t give!] him as much as he needs.
- d. Deuteronomy 24:15 - Before sundown, pay the wages of those to whom you owe wages.

3. Abstract Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 22:21 – Don’t mistreat foreigners.
- b. Exodus 22:22 – Don’t mistreat widows or orphans.
- c. Exodus 23:9 – Don’t mistreat foreigners; you know how it *feels* to be one.
- d. Leviticus 19:33 – Don’t mistreat foreigners, for you were once foreigners.
- e. Leviticus 25:46 – Don’t treat you fellow Israelites harshly.

4. Specific Direct Ameliorative Prohibitions

- a. Exodus 20:1 - 17 - The Ten Commandments. [Most of these can be considered as rather specific in nature: don’t murder, commit adultery, steal, accuse others falsely, desire another man’s house/wife/slaves, etc.]
- b. Exodus 21:20 – Don’t kill a slave or you will be punished [*how* not being specified].

- c. Exodus 22:25 – Don’t require interest in loaning to a poor man.
 - d. Exodus 23:6 – Don’t deny justice to a poor man [i.e., be even-handed].
 - e. Leviticus 19:13 – Don’t take advantage of [i.e., exploit] anyone, don’t rob anyone, don’t hold back anyone’s wages.
 - f. Leviticus 19:14 – Don’t curse a deaf man, or cause a blind man to stumble.
 - g. Leviticus 25:37 – Don’t charge a poor neighbor any interest; don’t make a profit from the food you sell him.
 - h. Deuteronomy 5:7 - 21 [The Ten Commandments are repeated here, in a version very close to the Exodus 20 version.]
 - i. Deuteronomy 23:19 - In loaning to a fellow Israelite, charge no interest.
5. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Injunctions (an interesting category!—in that there are more ethical laws in this category than in any other one)
- a. Exodus 16:23 - The seventh day is to be a day of rest, dedicated to the LORD. [John Dominic Crossan (*The Birth of Christianity*, 1998, p. 189) has made this brilliant comment regarding the significance of the “sabbath” day: “The sabbath day represents a temporary stay of inequality, a day of rest for everyone alike, for animals and humans, for slaves and owners, for children and adults. Why? Because that is how God sees the world. Sabbath rest sends all alike back to symbolic egalitarianism. It is a regular stay against the activity that engenders inequality on the other days of the week.”]
 - c. Exodus 23:11 - On each seventh year let the land rest, but the poor may eat whatever grows on it during that year.
 - c. Leviticus 19:9, 10 - In harvesting, leave the grain at the edges of the field for the poor; and leave the grapes in the vineyard that were missed for the poor and foreigners. [The law of *gleaning*.]
 - d. Leviticus 23:22 [The gleaning of grain is referred to again.]
 - e. Leviticus 23:42 - During the Festival of Shelters everyone is to live in temporary shelters for seven days. [What Crossan says regarding the sabbath day—see above—would also seem to be applicable here in that some *temporary* leveling would be involved, and this might help to renew feelings of empathy on the part of “haves” relative to the “have nots,” and other needy people, in their midst. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the wording here for verses 42 and 43 is: “All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants may know that the LORD made the people live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the LORD your God.”]

- f. Leviticus 25:4 - 6 - Let your land rest every seventh year. But even though it is not cultivated, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, foreigners, and domestic/wild animals [but not the poor?!].
 - g. Deuteronomy 5:12 - 14 - Observe the Sabbath; this includes foreigners in your midst, and slaves.
 - h. Deuteronomy 14:22 - 29 - [The law of the tithe (so often misrepresented—and utterly so—by the churches!)] Each year take a tenth of your production and celebrate with it; however, on each *third* year the tithe is to go to [what we today would call “food pantries”] for Levites [who have no property], foreigners, orphans, and widows.
 - i. Deuteronomy 23:24 - In walking on a path in someone’s vineyard you can eat grapes along the way, but are not permitted to take any away in a container.
 - j. Deuteronomy 23:25 - In walking on a path in someone’s grain field, you can eat the grain that you can pull off with your hands, but don’t cut any with a sickle [or carry any away in a container?].
 - k. Deuteronomy 24:19 - 21 - After gathering your crops, leave what’s left for foreigners, widows, and orphans. The same for your olive orchards and grape vineyards.
 - l. Deuteronomy 26:12 - Every third year give the tithe to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows.
6. Specific Indirect Ameliorative Prohibitions
- a. Leviticus 25:23 - Land cannot be permanently sold, because it belongs to God.
7. Abstract Restorative Laws
- a. Leviticus 19:18 - Love your neighbor as yourself [a law that should be followed not only in the here-and-now, but in a fashion that restores a situation wherein neediness should not occur, or occur but rarely].
8. Specific Restorative Laws
- a. Exodus 21:2 - All Hebrew slaves are to be set free in the seventh year.
 - b. Leviticus 25:10 - 12 - The fiftieth year [referred to as the Jubilee year] is to be set apart. All property that has been sold is to be restored to the original owner or his descendants; all slaves are to be returned to their families.
 - c. Deuteronomy 15:1 - At the end of each seventh year, cancel the debts of all those who owe you money [except for foreigners, verse 3 adds!].

We have, then, here an amazing set of laws, created for an agricultural society within which relatively little (on a per capita basis) long-distance trade occurred. This fact needs to be pointed out, because it is clear that the laws are not meant to be applied in an urban-industrial society such as the one we are living in at present. Still, they are of interest to us moderns because they demonstrate that a relatively simple society may have a rather sophisticated—and thoughtfully humane—set of laws. What I find of particular interest is the laws that specify *indirect* actions to help those in need. There is tacit recognition here that few want “handouts,” because their dignity as human beings is affected adversely in accepting handouts. Therefore, those who created this set of laws (at God’s direction, of course) had the sensitivity—the genius!—to create laws that enabled the needy to receive help while maintaining their dignity. This is not to say that outright giving is not commanded in these laws, but the inclusion of the various injunctions for helping others in indirect ways seems to suggest to those to whom they are directed (i.e., “haves”) that in helping others they give consideration not only to the *physical* needs of others, but the *psychological* need on the part of recipients for retaining their sense of dignity. What wisdom!

What’s interesting about the ethical laws presented in the Pentateuch is not just the laws themselves, but the *tactics* evident in the writings to *motivate* people to follow those laws (another contribution to the Tradition on the part of the early Hebrews). For example, consider the following familiar—and beautiful—passage:

Israel [said Moses], remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Never forget these commands [from God] that I am giving you today. Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4 - 9)

The writer in this case is using what might be termed a “reminder” strategy, advising his fellows to do various things to remind them of the laws (*all* of them, not just the ethical ones)—in the hope that they will then *follow* the laws (i.e., commands that they have attributed to God).

Three additional such tactics can be identified:

- Attempts to generate feelings of empathy for the needy in one’s society.
- Promises for obedience.
- Threats for *disobedience*.

Let us briefly address each in turn, for these, too, represent contributions to the Tradition.

1. Feelings of Empathy

- a. The Hebrews are frequently reminded in the Pentateuch that they were slaves in Egypt, and that the LORD had delivered them from that slavery. For example, in Deuteronomy

24:21, 22 we find these words: “When you have gathered your grapes, do not go back over the vines a second time; the grapes that are left are for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Never forget that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I have given you this command.”

This reminder seems to have two functions. First, by reminding the Hebrews that they (or their ancestors) had been slaves, the expectation was that they would feel empathy for slaves and other “have nots.” In fact in Exodus 23:9, we find: “Do not mistreat a foreigner; you know how it *feels* to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.” (italics added) Second, by reminding the Hebrews that God had delivered them from slavery, an implicit contract (“covenant”) was being stated: “I have done for you (have delivered you from slavery), now it’s your turn to do for me—and what I want you to do is obey My laws.”

- b. Institution of the Sabbath day, by giving everyone (including animals!) a day of rest, is an equalizer (if but temporary). Besides that, it gives “haves” a time to reflect on how they treat others relative to what God wants—so that they can resolve to do better during the upcoming week.
- c. The Festival of Booths is also not only a (temporary) leveler, but provides a period of time that brings “haves” and “have nots” together. This, along with the fact that it gives “haves” a fairly lengthy time to reflect on how they treat others, may cause “haves” to improve their relationships with their less fortunate fellows. [I use the term “less fortunate” deliberately here because the Bible’s dominant perspective on societal position seems to be that if one is a “have not,” this is not because one is lazy, etc., but, rather, because one either is being exploited by a fellow Hebrew, or has simply had bad luck. Indeed, the Hebrew Scripture’s explanation for why poverty exists in a society seems to be: “Haves” are ignoring God’s laws! How different is the attitude in our society!—in which instead of blaming “haves” for the existence of poverty (neediness in general), we “blame the victim”—and thoughtlessly at that.]
- c. The Passover festival might also be mentioned under the “empathy” heading, especially given that it is specifically a “remembrance” festival that commemorates God’s (alleged) deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. As one of the three “pilgrim festivals—the other two being Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Pentecost)—it would have resulted in people traveling to Jerusalem. Given that this would have resulted in contact with fellow Jews in other than “economic” (and other neediness situations—e.g., the lame) circumstances, these three festivals may have been designed (if but unconsciously), in part, to induce feelings of empathy in the society’s “haves” for those less fortunate than themselves.

2. Promises for Obedience, Threats for Disobedience

There is a famous passage in Deuteronomy (11:26 - 28) that reads: “Today I [the LORD] am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before.” What should be noticed

in this passage is that the LORD is not addressing Hebrews as *individuals* but as a *collective*. In Jesus's time the Law was being given an *individualistic* interpretation, but centuries earlier that was by no means the case: the Pentateuch has the Law being given to a *people*, and the blessings promised for obedience and curses threatened for disobedience are also directed at a *people*. (I might add here that it might be argued that what motivated to begin a "ministry" was his coming to recognize that the Law, as it was being promulgated in his time, had virtually turned the *True* Law of God on its head.)

Thus, the *promises* given in Leviticus 26:3-6 are directed at the Hebrews as a *people*: "If you [as a people] live according to my laws and obey my commands, I will send you rain at the right time, so that the land will produce crops and the trees will bear fruit. Your crops will be so plentiful that you will still be harvesting grain when it is time to pick grapes, and you will still be picking grapes when it is time to plant grain. You will have all that you want to eat, and you can live in safety in your land. I will give you peace in your land, and you can sleep without being afraid of anyone. I will get rid of the dangerous animals in the land, and there will be no more war there." Likewise, the punishments for disobedience are to be borne by the group, and are essentially the converse of the blessings for obedience. (See, e.g., the passage in Leviticus 26 that begins with verse 14.)

Note here the important point that although the ethical laws listed above are *implicitly* directed at the society's "haves," they are *explicitly* directed at the Hebrews as a *people*. Thus, the society's "have nots" are not made to feel that they are being singled out as people of a lesser sort—so that, again, psychological considerations were involved in how the laws were stated (even though the intentions were different). (Unfortunately, this fact that the laws were *seemingly* directed at the Hebrews in general became misused; for as thinking, at a later point, became more individualistic, "haves" began turning these laws, and specifically the covenant concept, on its head).

Interestingly, although the *promises* in the Pentateuch for obedience to the Law are directed at the group, and not individuals, such is not the case regarding *punishments* for disobedience. Many such punishments are intended for *individuals* who violate certain specific laws. For example, a number of such cases are given in Exodus 20, including this one (v. 14): "If a man marries a woman and her mother, all three shall be burned to death because of the disgraceful thing they have done; such a thing must not be permitted among you." In cases where the violator is *not* condemned to death, there may be punishment combined with the requirement of an offering of a sacrifice. This is not to say that all of the sacrifices (using that term generically) discussed in, e.g., Leviticus have the purpose of atoning for wrongful behavior (e.g., fellowship offerings were for a different purpose), but the *principal* purpose of sacrifices appears to be atonement—by an individual—for sins committed, thereby restoring the harmony that had existed prior to the "tearing of the societal fabric" associated with law-breaking.

I have suggested that ethical laws (and specifically ones *other* than those in the Ten Commandments!) are the "heart" of the Law. I have just completed a review of the ethical laws, but given that the Pentateuch contains many laws other than ethical ones, what is my basis for asserting that the *ethical* laws are the principal ones? What I would point to in response is that in Deuteronomy 15:4, 5 we find: "Not one of your people will be poor if you obey him [God] and carefully observe everything that I [Moses] command you today." Note that we have a *promise*

here, but it is one that is different from other promises in the Old Testament. It makes no reference to blessings that will be received by the Hebrews as a people if they obey God's commands, nor does it appeal to self-interest on the part of the society's "haves." It doesn't even try to convince people to obey God's commands because it is their turn to do for God (God having done for them, by liberating them from their Egyptian captors). Nor does it try to induce feelings of empathy for the poor in the society's "haves." A very unusual—and interesting—statement in Deuteronomy, then!

The "promise" here, note, is simply an off-hand—and ostensibly unimportant—commentary on what the *societal situation* will be like if God's laws are followed. Not just the ethical laws, mind you, but *all* of them. But take notice: The clear suggestion here is that ***the writers of these five books had as their ultimate (God-given) interest the achievement (restoration?) of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent.*** John Dominic Crossan would have us believe (as I noted earlier) that these writers wanted the creation of a radically egalitarian society, but I see that claim as *overstating* the Bible writers' intentions. Rather, I believe that a more reasonable conclusion is that they wished (being individuals in tune with God's wishes) to create/restore a situation within which physical neediness would be absent.

One might argue, I suppose, that they were "reaching" for the "utopian" situation described briefly at several points in the Old Testament. The "utopia" that I am referring to here is first presented (albeit negatively) in Deuteronomy 28:30: "You will build a house—but never live in it. You will plant a vineyard—but never eat its grapes." We find that utopian situation stated positively, however, in Isaiah 65:21, 22: "People will build houses and get to live in them—they will not be used by someone else. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the wine—It will not be drunk by others." And in Jeremiah 31:4, 5: "Once again I will rebuild you. Once again you will take up your tambourines and dance joyfully. Once again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria, and those who plant them will eat what the vineyards produce."

But such a utopia would be a rather strange one, from a Biblical standpoint, for two reasons. First, because it makes no reference to the presence of priests, one must assume that it would *have* no priests! Why? Because there would be no *need* for them, given that no one would be sinning in such a society, one would assume. Second, this utopia would have no need for the love command (except with reference to child care?), because no physical neediness would exist in the society. Given these features, and my assumption that the writers of the Bible were wise enough to recognize that there will always be poor people, orphans, and widows in the society, it seems to me that they believed (as God's intention) that what should be strived for was not a perfect society, but the minimization of physical (and psychological) neediness.

This is not to say that they did not *favor* societal system change: certainly the restorative laws that they developed had precisely that intent—and note that their strategy for bringing about societal system change was the institution of certain (restorative) laws. It is impossible to believe, however, that these writers believed that a perfectly egalitarian society *could* be created: by no means were they fools! Still, the presentation of these (exceedingly brief!) utopian discussions in the Old Testament must be regarded as a contribution to the Tradition, for they "authorize" us moderns to not only critique our society, but develop our own visions of the Good Society (a sort of activity that was rather common during the nineteenth century), and generate ideas as to "how to get there."

Note that to say that there are *poor* people in a society is not the same thing as saying that there are *needy* people in that society. A “poor” person in an agricultural society can be thought of as one who does not *produce* enough for a comfortable life, for whatever reasons. *That* fact, however, does not mean that that person must therefore *consume* little. For if the little that he produces is *supplemented* with, e.g., food that is supplied (directly and indirectly) to him by others, he will still be a “poor” person—but will no longer be a *needy* one. Thus, there is no warrant whatsoever for Christians (or others) to interpret this passage in a way that justifies their refusal to do anything for the needy: rather than justifying apathy, acquiescence, this passage demands *action*!

A few paragraphs earlier I reached the conclusion that the writers of these five books (constituting the Pentateuch) had as their ultimate interest the restoration of a society within which (physical) neediness was absent. This conclusion leads us another conclusion, one that is as surprising as it is important. In fact, the importance of this conclusion cannot be overstated. It is: **If it can be said that the Law had a *purpose*, this means that the various laws constituting the Law can—and should—be thought of not as *ends*, but as (mere) *means*.** This is a “bombshell” of a conclusion, of course, because it means that those—whether Christians or Jews—who have a fixation on the Law are, in effect, treating the Law as an idol!! (See, e.g., Deuteronomy 5:9.) They are failing to comprehend that there is a *goal* underlying the Law, that goal being the absence of physical and psychological neediness in the society. And failing to recognize the possibility of *continuing revelation* (as opposed to believing that revelation ended with the Bible).

Once one reaches this level of understanding, one can consider the question: Is there but *one* means to achieve a situation of “un-neediness”? Is the creation and promulgation of laws the only path to that sort of situation? Paul would add that there is more to it than that (as we shall see shortly). And the “utopia” discussion of a few paragraphs back suggests another means entirely: Work not to create/promulgate laws but, rather, work to bring about *societal system change* (under the assumption that law-generation will not achieve that end). Indeed, the reason I place Charles Fourier as tangentially in the Tradition is not because he was a notably “spiritual” person but, rather, because he proposed the creation of “phalanxes”—i.e., small, rather self-sufficient communities—as (what might be termed) “building blocks” of a new society. That is, Fourier proposed an *institutional* solution to the problem. Which is not to say, however, that the Bible fails to present such solutions. For what is the law of the tithe, e.g., if not an institution? A different sort of institution than the one proposed by Fourier, true, but an institution nonetheless.

Once we come to understand the laws of the Old Testament as *means* rather than ends, and as embodying only *past* revelations, we are in an intellectual position to make at least six further conclusions:

- Laws that appear in the Bible should not be embraced merely because of that fact. Rather, one should recognize that some of those laws tend to contribute to the end that I have identified here (i.e., minimal physical neediness), some do not. The former should be heeded, the latter should be ignored—the underlying principle here being that rules that are appropriate for one society at a given time may not be for another at another time. Put another way, the revelations that are granted to people in one place and time are not necessarily (all) relevant for people in another place and at another time; so that any

given generation, at a given place, should primarily look to *current revelation* to discover God's will.

- Laws *other* than those appearing in the Bible may be relevant for us today. After all, our urban-industrial society has little in common with the sort of society that existed in Bible times.
- Means *other than* laws may be relevant for achieving the end. For example, working for societal system change (a topic that was very much “on the table” in the United States during the nineteenth century) may be a better way to occupy one's mind and time than working to implement rules (including working to initiate governmental programs). Granted that the “restorative” laws of the Pentateuch obviously had as their intention bringing about societal system change (of a “restorative” nature); it does not follow, however, that those *today* desiring to bring about such change should think of law-generation as the appropriate path to such change.
- Although the focus of the Pentateuch seems to be on addressing physical needs, there is no reason why we should limit ourselves to such needs. Indeed, I will argue shortly that a notable part of Jesus's contribution was that he was sensitive to the psychological and spiritual needs of others. Not that such sensitivity is not also present in the Pentateuch as well, however: As I argued in discussing laws which involve helping others in an indirect way, one can assume that behind such laws was (tacit) recognition that people have self-esteem needs which must not be violated; there is a certain dignity in being human, and to impact that negatively is to commit a serious sin.
- The end of well-being need not be thought of just in terms of humans; there is no reason why animals cannot be included. Indeed, I would even assert that, e.g., geological features should be included—such as Devil's Tower in Wyoming, drumlins in Wisconsin, etc.—the idea here being that if it is true that we humans developed “in nature” (per the archeologists), we have a need for nature to be maintained, not desecrated.
- The end of reducing neediness itself can—and should—be challenged. That is, rather than thinking *just* in terms of working to reduce neediness (in all of its manifestations) in this world, we should recognize that today humans (and other animals) face two unique problems (besides the threat posed by the existence of thermonuclear weapons): The possibility that of the numerous (perhaps about 60%) species likely to be extinct by the end of this century because of “global warming,” with the possibility that humans will be among them! And the possibility that, having passed the “oil peak” point, we humans may soon be faced with a chaotic situation. Therefore, we should recognize that people (and other animals) can have well-being only if they *exist* (!), and should take “global warming” and the “oil peak” phenomenon seriously, and work to address those problems with the seriousness that they deserve. Besides, it is well to keep in mind that “global warming” is not only a future threat to many species (including our own), but in the here-and-now is causing problems especially for the poor of our world. One reason, indeed, why I advocate the creation of a new sort of institution (i.e., the Kingship of God

Fellowship) is that I see it as a possible vehicle for finding answers to this and other problems—answers that will be acted upon with intelligence and energy.

Thus, perceiving the laws of the Pentateuch as “mere” means—with not all of them even relevant for the end involved, and there being other (indeed *better*) means (such as current revelation)—is very liberating intellectually. Would that the Christians in our midst who are so fixated on, e.g., the Ten Commandments that they want them on public display everywhere would come to realize how misguided their viewpoint is. How lacking in true understanding of the Bible they are—to the extent that they sin by making an idol of the Ten Commandments!

The end that I have identified above (i.e., a situation where human well-being is common) is *implicitly present* in the Pentateuch, but one needs to *study* the Pentateuch carefully before this end becomes obvious. Is it present elsewhere in the Old Testament? Yes, it is present many places elsewhere, but I would like to conclude my discussion here of the “Old Testament” (i.e., Hebrew Bible) by referring to just a few passages in “prophetic” books that support my thesis. First, in Hosea 6:5, 6 we find: “What I [God] want from you is plain and clear. I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices.” How does one love God? One loves God by obeying his commands—or, more generally, by doing his will. What is that? To work for, e.g., a situation within which there is no neediness of any type (and, one might add, a situation wherein people are able to live in accord with their “design specifications”). Note that one way of perceiving this passage in Hosea is to regard it as Hosea’s summary, if not restatement, of the Law! So that “Hosea’s Law” contains just the law of loving God, and what *that* involves is doing God’s will—which is to work to eliminate neediness (such work being a form of worship).

Amos expressed much the same point of view. In Amos 5:21 - 24 we find: “The LORD says, ‘I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them: I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.’” What beautiful language! And what wonderful content!—that what God wants is that you treat your fellows well. We must keep in mind here, of course, that the “justice” that Amos was referring to was not the *legalistic* sort of justice that *we* think about, but justice in the sense of people getting what they deserve. And what is it that they deserve? They deserve to have their various needs met; thus, those of you whose needs *are* being met (and more) have an *obligation* to become aware of neediness among your neighbors, and somehow minister to that neediness—doing so constituting true worship. Don’t be like a typical American (guided by the values of materialism, greed, and selfishness) and make your primary goal becoming a member of the Billionaire’s Club! In effect, then, Amos also introduced a new Law, consisting of just one positive ethical command: Do justice—which involves ministering to the neediness that exists around you.

Finally, let me close this discussion of the Tradition in the prophets by quoting a beautiful passage from Micah (6:6 - 8): “What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” In a sense we have a new point added here, for Micah is saying in effect that to be part of

the Tradition is not only to do what God wants in *general* terms (i.e., work to eliminate neediness), but do what God wants in more *specific* terms. And, Micah seems to be saying, one can only gain knowledge regarding *that* by *communing* with God, by staying “in tune” with God—by being ever alert to *revelations* that God might choose to give one. This might be done via petitionary prayers wherein one petitions God for guidance; but might also be done, e.g., via the type of institution introduced later and “meditative prayer” (referred to again at a later point). Again, we in effect have with Micah a restatement of the Law, such that the Law is solely of a Tradition nature—i.e., the Law is about *proper* worship of God.

Micah’s allusion to communing with God raises the question: Does God only reveal truths to those who explicitly seek guidance from God? And in answering that question, I suggest that we consider the case of Samuel. In Chapter 3 of I Samuel we have that wonderful story of Samuel being called by God. Samuel had not *sought* anything from God; rather, *God chose* to speak to Samuel. The lessons here are twofold: God *still* reveals truths to humans, and we should not be surprised if God reveals truths to certain people even though they have not asked God for them.

In concluding my discussion of the Old Testament I feel compelled to quote what I regard as the most beautiful passage in the entire Old Testament—a passage that is “Traditional” if ever there was one: Job 29:12 - 17:

When the poor cried out, I helped them.
I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.
Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and
I helped widows find security.
I have always acted justly and fairly.
I was eyes for the blind,
and feet for the lame.
I was like a father to the poor
and took the side of strangers in trouble.
I destroyed the power of cruel men
and rescued their victims.

What we have here is another restatement of the Law, in effect. A restatement that is not only specific in content, but suggests that one should do God’s will not out of sense of obligation, or a sense that one will receive a reward, but a simple sense that it is a *privilege* to do God’s will. What a tremendous sentiment!

Which brings us to Jesus, who is treated here as a fully-human being. After all, the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) do not have Jesus claiming otherwise. In focusing on Jesus's *life*, as recorded in the (canonical) gospels, my interest is in particular events that demonstrate that he had an interest in the well-being of his fellows. That said, I am *not* claiming that Jesus's "ministry" was oriented *just* to the well-being of people in the here-and-now, only that this was a *part* of his ministry. In discussing Jesus, I find it convenient to use a "bulleted" approach:

- Jesus, at one point, declared (Matthew 5:17) that he did not reject the Old Testament Law. Given that that Law was (as we have seen) oriented to people's well-being, this means that Jesus was saying that a prime concern of his was the well-being of people—his fellow Jews in particular.
- In stating that one should do for others as one would like done to/for oneself (the "Golden Rule," Matthew 7:12), and then adding that this was the meaning of the Law of Moses, Jesus was stating explicitly that that Law was primarily about human well-being.
- Jesus recognized, however, that (Matthew 26:41) "the flesh is weak"—that it is not necessarily easy to live according to the Law (an idea that had some prominence in the thinking of Paul of Tarsus).
- In his diatribe of Matthew 23:13 – 28) he gave a brief summary of the Law—that (v. 23) its important teachings are justice, mercy, and honesty.
- Jesus's most brief summary of the Law was that (Mark 12: 30, 31) one should love one's neighbor as one loved oneself. In delivering this summary, Jesus was simply quoting Leviticus 19:18. The "love one another" of John 13:34 is another version of this statement.
- Another direct reference, by Jesus, to the Old Testament is given in Matthew 9:13, where he quotes Hosea 6:6 to the effect that what God wants is kindness, not animal sacrifices.
- In Matthew 6:2 Jesus states that one should give to the needy—but not make a show of it.
- In Luke 6:38 Jesus declares that one gives to others, God will give to you—providing here motivation for giving to others.
- In Matthew 25:31 – 46 we have Jesus's famous "plan of salvation": feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, receive strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison—injunctions that are repeated several times for emphasis. In the passage they are not explicitly presented as injunctions, but it is obvious that that is their intent. In vs. 32, 33 people are divided into two groups, with (v. 46) the righteous on the right, and people on the left sent to eternal punishment, while the people on the right (i.e., those who have obeyed the injunctions) given eternal life. (Interestingly, in John 17:3 "eternal life" is said to mean knowing God—so that it would appear that there is a conflict between these two passages.)

- The Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37) illustrates Jesus's conviction that the Law is about helping others, while also subtly criticizing the religious leaders of his society for failing to recognize this.
- Jesus advised his fellow Jews that (Luke 14:13, 14) when they feasted, they should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.
- Jesus protected (John 8:1 – 11) a woman caught in adultery from being stoned, demonstrating that compassion is a higher value than strict rule-following
- In the "beatitudes" of Matthew 5:3 – 11 most Bibles use the word "blessed" or "happy," but a better translation might rather be that "You are doing God's will if you are meek, if you hunger for justice, if you are merciful, if you are pure, in heart," etc. That is, you should follow God's law of love (of others) even if this means persecution or hardship on your part; don't necessarily expect that you will be rewarded for doing what's right.
- The admonition of Matthew 6:19 that one should not store up riches seems to suggest that if you are greedy, and try to acquire as much as you can for yourself, you may be reducing the ability of others to obtain what *they* need. That is, your actions may have an indirect negative effect on the well-being of others—so be careful in your actions.
- In Matthew 8:3 we have Jesus healing a man, and in 8:5 – 13 we have him healing the servant of a Roman officer. This indicates that Jesus not only wanted to issue instructions to others regarding what they should do, but wanted to do what he himself could to help others.
- In John 11:38-44 we have Jesus responding to an extreme case of ill-being: he raises his friend Lazarus from the dead!
- In John 10:10 Jesus declares that he has come that we might have life, and have it in all its fullness. He was here referring to well-being, but most certainly was not saying that one gains well-being especially from the consumption of goods. (Thank God that he had no training in Economics!)
- Jesus frequently used the parable in his ministry as a vehicle for conveying a message. Given that a parable is a puzzle, it not only encourages thought on the part of the individual hearer, but also encourages discussion with others. Such interaction can be a significant source of well-being for the parties involved.
- Some scholars have noted that Jesus used humor in his ministry (e.g., Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ*, 1964). This suggests that Jesus was at least dimly aware of the healing power of humor.

- The writer of the gospel of John has Jesus announce that he will be sending a Helper—the Holy Spirit—to us after his departure (John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; and 16:13). Although the writer has Jesus say that this Helper will act as a teacher, there is no reason why we cannot think of the Holy Spirit as also giving us ideas, motivating us, etc.

The significance of these references to the Helper in John's gospel should be recognized as the “bombshells” that they are. For they suggest that, on the one hand, one should not use the Bible as one's authority—so that so-called “Bible churches” are, *by their very nature*, actually *unBiblical*! And suggest, on the other hand, that no individual should be treated as “special,” and therefore an authority, either (a point solidified in Matthew 23, wherein Jesus is made to say that one should call no one Father except our Father in Heaven). Rather, one should look to *present-day revelation*—something the Quakers, for example, do, and something that underlies the design of the institution I present later. A qualification that should be noted here, however, is that although the Bible in effect gives us permission to not use it as an *authority*, it does not follow from this that one should not seek to be *authored* by the Bible (to allude here to distinctions associated with theologian Delwin Brown). That is, one can allow the Bible to play a significant role in one's life without using it as one's primary authority. Indeed, given that the Bible is a complex book that contains a variety of “messages,” anyone who claims that s/he is using the Bible as his or her principal authority is likely using the Bible to support a belief-value system *previously arrived at*.

I should add that the design of the KGF recognizes, with Paul, that the Holy Spirit can be looked to not only for guidance (i.e., ideas as to what to do) but for “possession”—an idea, by the way, not absent from the Old Testament. For in I Samuel 9:5 - 7 we find (Samuel speaking to Saul): “At the entrance to the town you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill, playing harps, drums, flutes, and lyres. They will be dancing and shouting. Suddenly the spirit of the LORD will take control of you, and you will join in their religious dancing and shouting and will become a different person. When these things happen, do whatever God leads you to do.” (For a brilliant discussion of the concept in a New Testament context, see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*, 1995).

Paul recognized (Romans 7) that although in his *mind* he knew what he should and should not do, what he called his “human nature” (what today we might term his *socialized* nature) caused him to do what he abhorred, and to refrain from doing what he *wanted* to do. He added, however, that (Chapter 8) if one is filled with the Holy Spirit (which, v. 6, “results in life and peace”), one will be able to overcome one's “human nature”—one's supposedly innate sinful nature. And in Galatians 5:16 - 25 Paul wrote at some length regarding the behavioral contrast between being controlled by human nature as opposed to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, although Paul claimed to admire the Law (e.g., Romans 7:12 and 8:22), and Acts 22:3 has him claim that had studied under Gamaliel (a famous rabbi of the time), his letters give one no indication that he knew the first thing about the Law! So that although the Pentateuch is very definitely reflected in the gospels, it is not at all reflected in Paul's letters! (I might add here that some scholars argue that the gospels—which were all written after any of Paul's letters—were written to “correct” Paul's letters!)

Still, Paul must be recognized as an important contributor to the Tradition in that he recognized that to obtain proper behavior, it is not enough to have a set of rules: just because one has a

thorough knowledge of what one should, and should not, do, it does not follow that one will be able to *follow* those rules. What one needs, in addition, is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that one's behavior will be controlled (or at least affected) by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, Paul, in his letters, provided no guidance as to *how* one can become Spirit-filled. But we need not regard that failure on Paul's part as a serious one, for my institution (the Kingship of God Fellowship) is designed to "attract" the Holy Spirit—to not only provide ideas/insights to participants, but to "possess" them—thereby changing (at least on a temporary basis) their personalities and behavior for the better.

In addition, Paul's use of a body analogy (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) can be interpreted as a "picture" of the Good Society—Paul's version of the "utopian" situation (of, e.g., Isaiah 65:21, 22) referred to earlier. If the "picture" offered in, e.g., Isaiah is rather individualistic in nature, that offered by Paul is decidedly *societal*. In effect, Paul sees a society as consisting of individuals and households, with different individuals/households engaged in different tasks (a "division of labor" à la Adam Smith!), but doing so in a harmonious manner. In Paul's view no one part (individual) is more important than another, and the implication here is that the Good Society would be rather "flat"—i.e., lacking a clear hierarchy, whether of influence, status, or wealth. One could also argue that implicit in this body analogy is the idea that a society should encourage its members to develop their talents, and then use them for the benefit of others; that doing so will contribute to the further development of one's abilities (while perhaps even adding new ones), and that by thereby gaining in competence and a sense of potency (a concept associated with psychologist Rollo May) one gains a sense of well-being.

There is also a suggestion in this body analogy that if interaction *ceases* to become harmonious, the society itself will die. Providing us, thereby, with a warning that unless we begin to work for societal system change in the direction of increasing harmony (and, I would add, greater ecological responsibility)—we face the danger of societal collapse (and perhaps the very extinction of our species).

In concluding this brief discussion of the New Testament, I would like to make reference to the rather prosaic Letter from James—which may or may not have been written by Jesus's brother James, but likely *does* express the views of many of the early (Jewish) followers. At 1:27 James states: "What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world." In effect, James repeated Jesus's injunction to love the neighbor, but in a more concrete form; and also recognized that there is a dominant worldview "out there" that guides most people, but must be resisted—because it is "out of tune" with the love of neighbor command. In addition, James makes the point that what's important is to be *religious*—rather than a Jew, Christian, or whatever. How heretical, some might say! But James's "letter" *is* in the Bible, after all.

Characteristics of the Kingship of God Fellowship: Introduction

I see the Kingship of God Fellowship (KGF) as an institution that, on the one hand, represents a continuation of the Biblical Tradition while also being oriented to our present societal, and world, situation. Although I especially see the KGF as having an orientation to problems on the horizon (such as global warming and reaching a world oil peak)—as opposed to problems in the here-and-now—and see the orientation as being more to prevention than to addressing current

needs, I also insist that KGF sessions be allowed to be open-ended (a point that I comment on in the next section). Given that a KGF would explicitly look to the Holy Spirit for guidance, any given KGF session would be open to wherever the Holy Spirit chose to lead it during that session. For although the KGF is designed to *attract* the Holy Spirit, it has no intention of committing the blasphemy of trying to *control* the Holy Spirit.

The KGF is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France); a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries; and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a KGF my personal experience with the adult “Sunday school” class at the church that I have been attending since 1980. The group has consisted of individuals who have certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group has his/her unique personality, each has had different life experiences, different educational levels are represented, etc. The group is not a random sample of American society, of course, but still is rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views are represented. Despite the latter fact, we all have felt free to express our views (so long as they are not too “heretical”!), because we know that the others in the group would respect them; for there has been a general consensus in the group that we are all “seekers,” and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I have led this group at various times, and have, during those periods, attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. So that when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes’s *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*, I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group has been extremely important in my own spiritual development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves).

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as “love the neighbor” is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a “fleshing out” of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps “energize” them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a “natural high”) during a given KGF session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to

have a “high” that lasted continuously for over three months. I don’t know why I was granted this valuable experience, but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon cross-culturally and historically. And, second, believe that such an experience was common with the first “Jesuans” (a point developed in the Davies book cited earlier).

KGF Characteristics: Specific Features

What is a Kingship of God Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

Participants in a given KGF meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one KGF session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a KGF is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four KGF sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first KGF, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random procedure. This means not only that participants in a KGF do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense). Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The KGF, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a KGf all accept Jesus’s love-of-neighbor command as their central “creed,” and the KGf is expected to have a future (and prevention) orientation, the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to these expectations.

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is (perhaps) assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity. It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop” passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet’s immediate left. (Another possibility is to use a rope segment—the allusion here being to John 15:5). That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Principles to Follow

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during KGf sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept the truism that one person’s views are as worth of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.
- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one’s truth” and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).

- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
- d. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given KGF will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Kingship of God Fellowship are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the KGF, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s

“ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the KGF is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the KGF has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.

Possible Consequences of KGF Participation

George Edgin Pugh, in his important *The Biological Origin of Human Values* (1977), discusses “instinctive human motives” (pp. 284 – 87), and among them lists an enjoyment of conversation. The KGF implicitly recognizes this as an important motive (or *need*, if you prefer), and uses it as the basis for making the fulfillment of that need a vehicle for achieving the objectives of a KGF.

Participation in a KGF can have a great variety of consequences, and in this section I wish to identify and discuss possible kinds of consequences, under several headings. I identify only *positive* consequences because—frankly—I believe that only such consequences would result from KGF participation!

Possible consequences of KGF participation can be identified and discussed at three different “scales”: (1) implications for KGF participants—as individuals and as a group; (2) societal implications; and (3) implications for other societies. Each is discussed in turn, but first some introductory comments.

Let me begin by asserting that if there is magic in ritual, then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture” (to use a term associated with Thorstein Veblen; however, it should be clear that I do not think of the KGF as “furniture”—something that is “just there.”) The “magic” in a KGF, it seems to me, results from one’s being aware of the possible consequences associated with participation in a KGF. That is, if one knows in advance what sorts of consequences participation in a KGF may have, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one’s thinking and behavior, *foreknowledge* of possible consequences of participation can also impact one’s thinking and behavior.

I find it interesting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher Max C. Otto, in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto (a Unitarian) would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the KGF, because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in KGF sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a KGF fosters the achievement of creative ideas (with the Holy Spirit's help, of course) concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

1. Implications for Participants

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a KGF would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a KGF, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the KGF in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a KGF proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others. My hope is that the design of the KGF—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the KGF's design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a KGF as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a KGF—the individual “crazinesses” will (with help from the Holy Spirit) get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.” (It's good, isn't it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Precisely *because* I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from KGF sessions, I believe that there will be *sociological* implications for participants. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm (because of the proprietary sense gained); and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of

solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the KGF has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the KGF’s design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the KGF is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a KGF can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking one’s mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one’s interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one’s claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

nyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a KF will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the KGF as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will experience improvement in their physical, emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the KGF experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be

affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in *The End of Nature*, I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity. And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective) blasphemous.

Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high. On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit; and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity “out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being,). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as *also* constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Despite the fact that participation in a KGF likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a KGF will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked” Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a KFF can one experience Deity in our society (L. Robert Keck’s “meditative prayer” represents another possibility), I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience” (as Marrairie C. Kettell stated in a sermon recently). A KGF, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a KGF can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the KGF. If KGFs involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to humankind’s survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind’s very existence is currently being threatened by “global warming,” among other factors.

2. Societal Implications

The reference here is specifically to *our* society, the following subsection making a few comments on implications beyond our borders. The reference to “global warming” in the previous paragraph should perhaps be included in this subsection; but as its reference is to humankind, and uses a term—“salvation”—more commonly used in discussing individuals than humankind in general, I thought it more “natural” to place it where I did.

The first point to make here is that I foresee that among the ideas generated during KGF sessions will be ideas regarding how to change the “shape” of the society so that it will “produce” and value members who have the personal qualities identified by Jesus, Paul, etc. Individuals vary, of course, in their genetic endowment and in their experiences (etc.)—meaning that some individuals will possess positive traits to a greater degree than others. For that matter, however, even with a given member there will be variation *over time* in the degree to which one possesses any given positive trait: even the best of us will feel anger, envy, etc., and be rude, presumptuous, etc. at some time.

Insofar as there is a proliferation of KGFs within the society (and I hope that there is!), those associated with them have the best chance of acquiring positive traits, and as habits. But other mechanisms/institutions might also come to be created that also have such an effect. I will not, however, speculate here regarding other sorts of possibilities—except for a couple of them

As a proliferation of KGFs occurs, there may be changes in the governmental structure of the society, so let me briefly comment on possible changes in that realm. One change that I would anticipate would be the elimination of bicameral legislatures—a change that would be made difficult because involving constitutional change, but a sort of change that is at least conceivable. At present, only the state of Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, and I am not aware that Nebraskans regard that as a problem. Given this, why not rid our society of the U. S. Senate and all other “upper” legislative chambers? Bicameral legislatures were created in the first place to block democratic decision-making—and perhaps are appropriate for societies within which positive personal traits (such as those that have been listed) are not common. Their purpose, however, would be non-existent in a society wherein the KGF was common, so that their existence would only serve to make governmental decision-making cumbersome—and more expensive than it would need to be.

Assuming this sort of change, an additional sort of change that might occur would be a change in how legislators—often called “representatives,” without good reason!—are selected. Currently, they are commonly selected from electoral districts or are elected “at large.” The former method is subject to “gerrymandering” (an issue addressed by the Supreme Court especially in the 1960s), and neither method will ensure a “replica of the realm” legislature (or “portrait in miniature,” to use John Adams’s terminology). Existing methods of selecting legislators might very well be replaced with some sort of “proportional representation” system—such as the “list” system used in Germany (in which case one votes for a “party”—which develops a list of candidates, and lists individuals in order of the party’s judgment as to qualifications), which produces a “representative” (in a statistical sense) assembly in that seats are awarded in proportion to number of votes received by party.

Related to these changes of an institutional nature, there likely would be (one has a right to hope!) a disappearance of the lobbyist as an “institution”!

There is also the likelihood that there would be changes in the society’s economy, so that it is also advisable to comment briefly on anticipated changes in that realm. I foresee two changes as of especial importance—these having a variety of implications, some of which I will mention below. First, the *per-capita* consumption of goods is likely to be reduced substantially. Second, “production for use” is likely to become more common than it is now.

Recently, during a church service, we were handed a card with the following quotation from Adam Hamilton’s *Enough: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity* (2009):

Lord, help me
to be grateful for what I have,
to remember that I don’t need most of what I want,
and that joy is found in simplicity and generosity.

As my discussion above suggests, I agree entirely with this statement, but would add that I regard it as rather incomplete. (But, then, a small card will not accommodate many words!) Most importantly, I would add that anyone who comes to recognize that s/he doesn’t really need most of what s/he has will then—logically—give that excess to those who *can* make use of it (or simply discard that portion that would not be needed by anyone), and change future buying habits. This changed purchasing behavior may be combined with a desire to oneself produce for at least some of one’s needs (e.g., by engaging in gardening, building one’s own furniture, etc.), and insofar as these changes occur, the implications for the economy can be considerable. Given that many goods currently consumed would no longer be purchased:

- Many production facilities in this country would be forced to close down.
- Many goods currently imported would no longer be.
- Many retail stores selling such goods would be forced to close.

Such changes would likely result in many people moving from larger cities to smaller ones—or to eco-communities or rural areas.

The fact that the number of work and shopping trips would decline greatly would mean that automobile (and automobile parts) production-importation would be reduced, as would be the number of automotive service stations, and automotive repair shops. Petroleum refineries would also be forced to shut down—but there likely would be the development of facilities for producing biofuels (from algae, e.g.).

Insofar as structures would continue to be built, they likely would be built to be energy-efficient and less subject to deterioration over time. Therefore, there would be a shift in the production of materials used, and less new building during a given year.

Although work- and shopping-related movement might be reduced substantially, I would expect a significant increase in travel for sightseeing purposes—trips to experience natural features such as the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, Devil’s Tower, etc., and also trips to visit historical sites such as restored Shaker communities, the Washington monument, Gettysburg, etc.

A final point that I would like to mention in this subsection is that insofar as positive personal traits such as the ones listed above become commonplace, there would be little need for police officers, lawyers, judges, prison officials-guards, etc., so that those professions would basically disappear.

Note that I have been referring to the disappearance of many jobs/professions as a “natural” accompaniment to the development of the Good Society, and a question likely to arise is: What will these unemployed people then do?! One suggestion I will offer here is: Create an eco-community for yourself and others, or move to one already existing! What I am hoping is that enterprising individuals—whether or not unemployed—will step forth to create a new sort of capitalistic society! Michael Moore’s recent movie *Capitalism* suggests that capitalism is inherently an evil sort of economic system. Michael, please read this paper; you may change your mind!

I should perhaps add here that although a proliferation of KGFs is likely to impact our society significantly (e.g., its economy), it is *certain* that our passing the “peak oil” point and global warming will be impacting our society—and primarily in negative ways. A reason, then, for initiating a KGF movement is to obtain the benefits of such a movement while contributing to a “defusing” of problems associated with global warming and passing the “peak oil” point.

3. Implications for Other Societies

I will be very brief here. Movement, within our society, toward a society more and more dominated by KGFs will mean that more and more of our fellows will develop positive personal traits. In acting on those traits they will act not only to make our society a better place to live, but will do the same for other societies. In doing so, I would only caution them to be sensitive of cultural differences that exist between other societies and ours so that we will refrain from doing unintentional damage to the fabric of other societies. We have done too much of that already!

Conclusions

We live in perilous times, and (for a variety of reasons) I think that we make a mistake if we look to our political leaders for proper leadership. We should keep in mind that when Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont visited the United States in 1831 – 32, one thing that especially impressed Tocqueville (as he indicated in the *Democracy in America* written later) was the (private) voluntary associations that were so common. The KGF would be a type of such an association, so that it would not only be a religious institution, but one that would be a part of the American tradition.

I think of the KGF primarily as a religious institution for the simple reason that I admire the Biblical Tradition, and want to be a part of it. In addition, however, I have become convinced that if we are to stave off the potentially horrendous problems that lie on the horizon, we will be “saved” only via a religious movement—and particularly one that is in the Biblical Tradition.

Much of that Tradition needs to be retained today, but it is also necessary to add to that Tradition—especially in that an orientation to the *prevention* of problems needs to be made a part of the Tradition of today. Some extremely serious problems loom on the horizon—especially our passing the “peak oil” point and global warming, but also the threat posed by thermonuclear weapons. Given this fact, and the fact that our political leaders give us little reason to have confidence in them, we need to address these problems as private citizens—acting as part of a religious movement, one that is in the Biblical Tradition in particular. Which is why I have such confidence in the KGF: what better help can we get than that promised to us by Jesus in the form of the Helper, or Holy Spirit?!

Although I think of the KGF as a religious institution, I would not want to discourage “secular” people from initiating analogous fellowships—perhaps calling them Structured Interaction Groups (SIGs) as an alternative for Kingship of God Fellowship. After all, the more people who become involved in this movement, the greater the chance that it will be successful.

In conclusion, I would like to note two questions that occur in the Bible that have particular significance: Am I my brother’s keeper? (Genesis 4:9), and “Who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:29) The Genesis question should be regarded as a rhetorical one, for the answer implicit in it is: “Of course!” And the second one is one that invites us to interpret “neighbor” in the broadest possible terms: The neighbor is not only one who has a residence close to one’s own, but one who resides in the same city, the same state, the same country, and the world. In addition, however, “neighbor” should not only be thought of as a contemporary person, but people *not* in existence now, but who will be in the future—if there *is* a human future, that is. Our Native American brothers, in making decisions, often made them with the seventh generation hence in mind. Today, we all need to adopt such a perspective. We need to continue to love the neighbor in the here-and-now, but must add a new dimension to our loving—the future. The Kingship of God Fellowship, I believe, can play a significant role in the shape that the future takes.

Appendix: Some “Peak Oil” Comments

[An excellent web site on “peak oil” is Matt Savanar’s www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net/ . This site not only contains a great deal of detailed information, but also many links to sources.]

I believe that the reasoning behind the projection that oil prices are about to increase, perhaps precipitously, is as follows:

1. Most economies in the world are highly dependent upon fossil fuels (including oil derived from petroleum)—not only as energy sources, but as “raw materials” for many products.
2. All fossil fuels are non-renewable resources, formed millions of years ago, and over a long period of time.
3. With qualifications, we can say that the total quantity of fossil fuels is limited. I say “qualifications” because as prices for fossil fuels increase, the expectation has been that deposits that have presented difficulties for extraction may become economical to extract. And referring specifically to oil, sources other than petroleum (such as oil tar sands, oil shale) may become economical as sources.

4. Geologists are now highly confident that they have discovered all major deposits of fossil fuels, and most minor ones. Technological advances in discovery techniques have given geologists this confidence.
5. Regarding specifically oil derived from petroleum, geologists now estimate that about one half of the oil that ever existed has been extracted, and used up.
6. M. King Hubbert has determined, using empirical data, that if petroleum *discoveries* are plotted over time, the result is a normal distribution (i.e., “bell curve”); and that the same is true for petroleum *production*—with, though, a time lag in the latter. Regarding the production curve specifically, the interpretation here is that production tends to increase over time, reach a peak level at some point in time, and then begin to decline.
7. Geologists, basing their reasoning on Hubbert’s research, have concluded that from a world standpoint, the level of production is now at its peak—and will begin declining. What gives them confidence in this prediction is that in 1956 Hubbert predicted, for the “lower 48” states of the United States, that peak production would be reached in 1970—and was.
8. The world’s population is increasing, and more and more countries are “modernizing” their economies. Thus, world demand for oil is increasing.
9. Seemingly, an increasing demand would not only increase the price of oil, but also stimulate more production of oil. However, because of increasing costs in producing oil (from existing fields, and from alternate sources, such as oil tar sands), this is not likely to occur to any great extent—meaning that oil prices could begin rising rapidly soon, and continue to rise. Indeed, the “Hubbert curve” predicts that the production level will begin to *decrease*, so that the price of oil could begin increase precipitously.

I should note that even if there would be population stability over time (i.e., no growth, and all countries remaining at their current levels of economic development), the fact that more and oil would need to be produced to meet continuing demand would mean that the *costs* of producing a constant number of barrels of oil year after year would continually increase—resulting in increasing prices for oil. A growing population, combined with increasing “modernization,” simply exacerbates the problem.

10. Given that so many economies are so dependent on oil (especially the more “advanced” ones), rising prices are likely to wreak havoc on many economies—resulting in unemployment, violence, starvation, disease, etc.

Continuing the Tradition: A Proposal

Alton C. Thompson, December 10, 2009

The proposal which follows receives its primary motivation from the following two statements:

- Physicist David L. Goodstein (www.its.caltech.edu/~dg/Essay2.pdf): “Civilization as we know it will come to an end some time in this century”
- Scientist James Lovelock (of “Gaia Hypothesis” fame; *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*, 2006, p. xiii) “. . . before this century is over, billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the arctic region where the climate remains tolerable.”

Prof. Goodstein’s statement is based on the projection that the “peak oil” point for earth has been (or is about to be) reached—meaning that the world’s production of oil soon will be trending downward. This will result in a drastic increase in the price of oil, and that increase will play havoc with our economy, and therefore society (to say nothing of other economies and societies). Dr. Lovelock’s claim has its basis on the fact that the burning of fossil fuels—including oil—is causing (that array of phenomena commonly referred to as) “global warming,” and that as negative feedback mechanisms therefore begin (at some point soon—if they have not already begun) to give way to positive feedback ones, “climate” change, in its various manifestations, will become rapid—with the eventual result being that our species will become virtually extinct before the century is out (and that perhaps 60% of all species existing now will be extinct by 2100 CE—as Tim Flannery notes in *Weather Makers*, 2005, p. 183).

There are good scientific reasons for expecting that in the years ahead—the *very near future*, in fact—humans will experience some unprecedented problems, and may even become (virtually) extinct before the century is out. Yet, one detects no sense of urgency in the general public, our governmental leaders, or media spokespersons. Because we humans may not, therefore, respond quickly enough—or even appropriately—to the problems that lie ahead of us, we humans may very well be experiencing chaotic conditions within a few years, violence (private and governmental) will likely increase, as will starvation and disease—and who knows what else. Our modern prophets may be paid as little heed as the prophets of old.

Some efforts are being made by governments and private organizations (such as business firms) to address the problems that lie on the horizon. But factors such as lobbyists and the “bottom line” will likely place severe limits on how much those organizations accomplish. Given, then, that it would appear to be foolish to look to such organizations as potential “saviors,” it is incumbent upon us as private citizens—acting as individuals and as members of voluntary associations—to recognize that we live in perilous times, and to do what we can to stave off catastrophe. Perhaps if voluntary associations begin to supplement the efforts of governments and firms, humans will have a future after all. Which would greatly please my children and grandchildren! There are, of course, no guarantees that salvation will be possible, even with the best efforts. Still, that’s no excuse for not trying to avert catastrophe.

Since at least the early 1800s voluntary associations have played an important role in American society—a fact noted by Alexis de Tocqueville during his travels in this country in 1831 – 1832. It should not be surprising, then, that my proposal here is for a special type of such an association—what I call the *Kingship of God Fellowship* (KGF). I use “kingship” here rather than “kingdom” in deference to scholars who argue that “kingship” is a better translation of the relevant word. The significance of thinking of God’s *kingship* is that that concept suggests *rulership*; and *that*, in turn, lends itself to the interpretation that God’s rulership is a *continuing* phenomenon: God continues, through time, to reveal truths to those who will listen, and those who act on those truths can then be said to be *ruled* by God—participating in God’s rulership.

In effect, then, I am suggesting that only a *religious* voluntary association movement can be successful in supplementing the efforts of governments and firms. I recognize, however, that there are two problems associated with that solution (actually, a *means* to solutions). First, it is unlikely to be attractive to the secular members of our society, which is unfortunate—given that many in this category are intelligent, educated, and talented. And second, the proposal may not even attract many religious people because their concept of “religious” differs substantially from mine. Still, I would like to think that the sort of voluntary association I advocate herein would attract enough individuals—religious or otherwise—to make a difference. (I should add that the self-exclusion from KGFs of deniers of, e.g., “global warming” likely would be a blessing for any KGF movement that develops!)

Shortly, I define what I call the “Biblical Tradition,” and identify some of the major components of that Tradition. I then assert that my KGF proposal continues that Tradition, and even advances it. I suspect that some will be attracted to the KGF movement because they find the KGF itself attractive; and that others will be attracted to the movement not only because of that, but because they have a felt need to become a part of a movement, and are attracted to the particular Tradition of which the KGF is a part. Some of these individuals may currently be “churched,” others may not be—perhaps because they perceive existing churches as insufficiently “Traditional.”

I should add that although I perceive a KGF movement as especially having a future and preventive orientation (given the seriousness of the threats that we face), this does not mean that KGFs would have no interest in the here-and-now. After all, our society—the world, indeed—has plenty of immediate problems, and it would be contrary to the very “heart” of the Tradition to ignore those problems.

Any given tradition—including the Biblical Tradition—tends to have a core element that remains relatively unchanged over time. Still, traditions change in their details over time; they *must* do so, in fact, if they are to remain alive. If the core of the Biblical Tradition is “love the neighbor,” the KGF retains this heart, but also re-defines “neighbor” to include future people not yet living—“down to the seventh generation,” as our Native American brothers might put it. I should perhaps add, however, that although the means that I recommend—i.e., the KGF—borrows elements from the Bible, it has no exact counterpart in the Bible. Without hesitation, however, I claim for it the status of a Tradition institution.

Two topics require attention here, the nature of the Biblical Tradition, and the nature of the Kingship of God Fellowship. Both are discussed briefly here. For a fuller discussion see my

“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” (www.religioustolerance.org/worship.pdf), which I wrote (in 2007) using the pen name “James B. Gray.” All references to the Bible herein—including quotations—are from my *Good News Bible*, 1976 edition. (Given that this title projects a theological bias that I do not share, let me apologize in advance for my use of this Bible.)

The Biblical Tradition

As I perceive the Biblical Tradition, it has its basis—and origins—in the fact that in ancient Hebrew society a degree of inequality developed such that some particularly sensitive members of the society came to conclude that God was rather displeased with the situation. Why? First, the inegalitarian situation itself meant that a few members of the society had lives of excess, while most members had lives of insufficiency. Neither of these facts, these individuals sensed, was pleasing to God, but especially the latter one—because it meant ill-being, suffering on the part of those unable to have their basic needs met; and *that*, they “knew,” was displeasing to God. Who, after all, had placed the original humans in an Edenic situation.

Another implication of the society being inegalitarian was that the leaders were prone to engage in armed conflicts, meaning that many subjects were forced to participate in military engagements—and get injured, or even killed, as a result. This meant that many in the society were acquiring the status of being lame, blind, widows, or orphans—who for that reason could not have a dignified life, and might not even be able to continue living. Which facts also displeased God, they concluded.

These individuals realized that it was not realistic for the (then basically agricultural) society to revert to a simpler level (e.g., one in which gathering-hunting were practiced), so that the only way to reduce ill-being in the society was to convince members of the elite to tend to the well-being needs of their fellows. But how to convince them? The starting point, the Bible suggests, was that God decided to develop a set of rules (“commandments”), make those rules known to Moses, and then have Moses communicate the rules to “the people”—with members of the elite in particular being the intended audience.

My own upbringing in Christianity (which occurred long ago, as I’m now a “senior citizen”) was such that I had come to think of the “Law” in negative terms—as a “burden,” and something which the coming of Jesus had made obsolete, in fact. However, when I began a serious reading of the books of the Pentateuch several years ago, I quickly came to realize how amazing they are. (The “Pentateuch” consists of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Judges.) How subtle are some of the laws therein contained! How sensitive to one’s psychological need for maintaining a sense of self-respect are some of the laws—while, though, simultaneously addressing physical needs! How brilliantly the question of motivation is dealt with! Etc. In describing key elements of the Tradition, I therefore feel compelled to begin by noting some of the salient features of the Law presented in the Pentateuch—specifically, those laws of an ethical nature, i.e., concerned with attending to the well-being of others. (I find it highly unfortunate that those of us raised in Christianity have learned the *stories* presented in the Pentateuch, but have skipped over the *Law*—except for the Ten Commandments.) Then, I identify other contributions to the Biblical Tradition—using a “bulleted” approach throughout the presentation.

- One of the interesting features of the Law is its variety:
 - Direct, but abstract, directives, such as love your neighbor as you love yourself (Leviticus 19:18) and respect your parents (Deuteronomy 5:6).
 - Direct, specific directives, such as pay the wages of those to whom you owe wages before sundown (Deuteronomy 24:15).
 - Direct, abstract prohibitions, such as don't mistreat widows or orphans (Exodus 22:22) and don't mistreat foreigners: you know how it feels to be foreigners (from being slaves in Egypt) (Exodus 23:9).
 - Direct, specific prohibitions such as (most of) the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1 - 17) and don't curse a deaf man, or cause a blind man to stumble (Leviticus 19:14).
 - Specific, but indirect, injunctions such as you are to leave the seventh day as a day of rest, dedicated to the LORD (Exodus 16:23). John Dominic Crossan (*The Birth of Christianity*, 1998, p. 189) has made this brilliant comment regarding the significance of the "sabbath" day: "The sabbath day represents a temporary stay of inequality, a day of rest for everyone alike, for animals and humans, for slaves and owners, for children and adults. Why? Because that is how God sees the world. Sabbath rest sends all alike back to symbolic egalitarianism. It is a regular stay against the activity that engenders inequality on the other days of the week."

The "gleaning" law: In harvesting, one is to leave the grain at the edges of the field for the poor, and leave the grapes that were missed in the vineyard for the poor and foreigners (Leviticus:19:9, 10).

Leviticus 25:4 – 6 is of interest because in it concern is shown not only for people, but for the land and animals—both domestic and wild. In this passage one is instructed to honor the LORD by leaving the land fallow every seventh year. The passage points out, however, that even though the land is being given a rest, it will still provide food (via gleaning) for the land owner, his slaves, his hired men, foreigners, and animals.

During the Festival of Shelters everyone is to live in temporary shelters for seven days. (What Crossan says regarding the sabbath day—see above—would also seem to be applicable here in that some *temporary* leveling would be involved, and this might help to renew feelings of empathy on the part of "haves" relative to the society's "have nots," and other needy people, in their midst. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the fact that the wording here for verses 42 and 43 is: "All the people of Israel shall live in shelters for seven days, so that your descendants may know that the LORD made the people live in simple shelters when he led them out of Egypt. He is the LORD your God.") (Leviticus 23:42).

And, then, there is the much-distorted (!) law of the tithe: Each year one is to take a tenth of one's production, and celebrate with it. However, on the third year the tithe is to go to (what today we would call) food pantries, and that food is to be given to the Levites (who lack property), to foreigners, to orphans, and to widows. (Deuteronomy 14:22 – 29)

- Restorative directives, such as Hebrew slaves are to be set free in the seventh year (Exodus 21:2) and all property sold is to be restored to its original owner (or descendants) every fiftieth year (“Jubilee”) (Leviticus 25:10 - 12).
it:
- Tie God's commands to your arms, wear them on your foreheads, write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4 – 9).
- Trying to motivate by inducing feelings of empathy for those in need:
 - ❖ People, in being advised to practice gleaning, are reminded that they had been slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 24:21, 22). In effect God was saying: “I did for you (i.e., I freed you from your Egyptian captors), now it's your turn to do for me—and what I want you to do is to obey my commands, such as the gleaning one.”
 - ❖ As Crossan has argued, the Sabbath was a temporary leveler (as was the Festival of Shelters); more importantly, each gave members of the elite time to reflect on how they treated others, and whether their treatment was consistent with God's commands.
 - ❖ The Passover festival might also be mentioned under the “empathy” heading, especially given that it is specifically a “remembrance” festival that commemorates God's deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. As one of the three “pilgrim festivals—the other two being Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Pentecost)—it would have resulted in people traveling to Jerusalem. Given that this would have resulted in contact with fellow Jews in other than “economic” (and other neediness situations—e.g., the lame and blind) circumstances, these three festivals may have been designed (if but unconsciously), in part, to induce feelings of empathy in the society's “haves” for those less fortunate than themselves.
- Offering promises for obedience—these directed, though, at the Hebrews as a *people*, not at individuals: “Today I [the LORD] am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before.” (Leviticus 26:3 – 6).

- What I regard as the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible is this one from Job 29:12 - 17:

When the poor cried out, I helped them.

I gave help to orphans who had nowhere to turn.

Men who were in deepest misery praised me, and

I helped widows find security.

I have always acted justly and fairly.

I was eyes for the blind,

and feet for the lame.

I was like a father to the poor

and took the side of strangers in trouble.

I destroyed the power of cruel men

and rescued their victims.

We have here, in effect, a summary of the Law, emphasizing its orientation to human well-being: One should do what one can for others in need, not out of a sense of obligation, nor even because doing so is in accordance with God's will but, rather, because one "just knows," as a human, that this is the right thing to do. I believe that it was philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who once said that the reason one will unthinkingly attempt to rescue a drowning person is that one perceives that drowning person as oneself—whether that person is a blood relative or not has no bearing on one's "decision."

- In Hosea 6:5, 6 we find: "What I [God] want from you is plain and clear. I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices." How does one love God? One loves God by obeying his commands—or, more generally, by doing his will. What is that? To attempt to reduce neediness, and even work for, e.g., a situation within which there *is* no neediness of any type. Note that one way of perceiving this passage in Hosea is to regard it as Hosea's summary, if not restatement, of the Law. So that "Hosea's Law" contains just the law of loving God, and what *that* involves is doing God's will—which is to work to eliminate neediness (such work being a form of worship—its constituting, in fact, the only sort of worship that God wants).

Amos expressed much the same point of view. In Amos 5:21 - 24 we find: "The LORD says, 'I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them: I will not accept the animals you have fattened to bring me as offerings. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to

your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry.” What beautiful language! And what wonderful content!—that what God wants, and *only* wants, is that you treat your fellows well.

We must keep in mind here, of course, that the “justice” that Amos was referring to was not the *legalistic* sort of justice that *we* think about, but justice in the sense of people getting what they deserve. And what is it that they deserve? They deserve to have their various needs met; thus, those of you whose needs *are* being met (and more) have an *obligation* to become aware of neediness among your neighbors, and somehow minister to that neediness—doing so constituting true worship. Don’t be like a typical American (guided by the values of materialism, greed, and selfishness) and make your primary goal becoming a member of the Billionaire’s Club! In effect, then, Amos also introduced a new Law, consisting of just one positive ethical command: Do justice—which involves ministering to the neediness that exists around you.

Also, there is this famous passage from Micah (6:6 - 8): “What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” In a sense we have a new point added here, for Micah is saying, in effect, that to be part of the Tradition is not only to do what God wants in *general* terms (i.e., work to eliminate neediness), but do what God wants in more *specific* terms. And, Micah seems to be saying, one can only gain knowledge regarding *that* only by *communing* with God, by staying “in tune” with God—by being ever alert to *revelations* that God might choose to give one. This might be done via petitionary prayers wherein one petitions God for guidance; but might also be done, e.g., via the type of institution introduced later (i.e., the KGF) and via “meditative prayer” (a method of prayer introduced by L. Robert Keck, *The Spirit of Synergy*, 1978). Again, we in effect have with Micah a restatement of the Law, such that the Law is solely of a Tradition nature—i.e., the Law is about *proper* worship of God, and what *that* involves is tending to the needs of His creatures. And, I might add, all of His other creations as well—including other species, and even natural features such as Devil’s Tower in Wyoming and drumlins in Wisconsin

- The Letter from James—which may or may not have been written by Jesus’s brother James—is a rather prosaic book, but likely *does* express the views of many of the early (Jewish) followers of Jesus in the early years of the first century. At 1:27 James states: “What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.” In effect, James repeated Jesus’s injunction to love the neighbor, but in a more concrete form—one clearly “in tune” with Hebrew Scriptures, in fact. Also the author of James seemingly recognized that there is a dominant worldview “out there” that guides most people, but must be resisted—because it is “out of tune” with the love of neighbor command. In addition, James makes the point that what’s important is to be *religious*—rather than a Jew, Christian, or whatever. How heretical, some might say! But James’s “letter” *is* in the Bible, after all.

- An important point that Paul of Tarsus made explicit is that having a set of laws is not, in itself, enough to get desired behavior from people. (I would also add that it is not even enough to engage in efforts to *motivate* people to follow those laws.) Paul recognized (Romans 7) that although in his *mind* he knew what he should and should not do, what he called his “human nature” (what today we might term his *socialized* nature) caused him to do what he abhorred, and to refrain from doing what he *wanted* to do. He added, however, that (Chapter 8) if one is filled with the Holy Spirit (which, v. 6, “results in life and peace”), one will be able to overcome one’s “human nature”—i.e., one’s supposedly innate sinful nature. And in Galatians 5:16 - 25 Paul wrote at some length regarding the behavioral contrast between being controlled by “human nature” as opposed to the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, although Paul claimed to admire the Law (e.g., Romans 7:12 and 8:22), and Acts 22:3 has him claim that had studied under Gamaliel (a famous rabbi of the time), his letters give one no indication whatsoever that he knew the first thing about the Law!
- The writer of the gospel of John has Jesus announce that he will be sending a Helper—the Holy Spirit—to us after his departure (John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; and 16:13). Although the writer has Jesus say that this Helper will act as a teacher, there is no reason why we cannot think today of the Holy Spirit in broader terms, as also giving us ideas, motivating us, etc.

The significance of these references to the Helper in John's gospel should be recognized as the “bombshells” that they are. For they suggest that, on the one hand, one should not use the Bible as one’s authority! And suggest, on the other hand, that no individual should be treated as “special,” and therefore an authority (a point solidified in Matthew 23, wherein Jesus says that one should call no one Father except our Father in Heaven). Rather, one should look to *present-day revelation*—something the Quakers, for example, do—and something that underlies the design of the institution that I present shortly. A qualification that should be noted here, however, is that although the Bible in effect gives us permission to not use it as an *authority*, it does not follow from this that one should not seek to be *authored* by the Bible (to allude here to distinctions associated with theologian Delwin Brown). That is, one can allow the Bible to play a significant role in one’s life without using it as one’s primary authority. Indeed, given that the Bible is a complex book that contains a variety of “messages,” anyone who claims that s/he is using the Bible as his or her principal authority is, rather, likely using the Bible simply to support a belief-value system *previously arrived at*!

I should add that the design of the KGF recognizes, with Paul, that the Holy Spirit can be looked to not only for guidance (i.e., ideas as to what to do) but for “possession”—an idea, by the way, not absent from Hebrew Scripture. For in I Samuel 9:5 - 7 we find (Samuel speaking to Saul): “At the entrance to the town you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the altar on the hill, playing harps, drums, flutes, and lyres. They will be dancing and shouting. Suddenly the spirit of the LORD will take control of you, and you will join in their religious dancing and shouting and will become a different person. When these things happen, do whatever God leads you to do.” (For a brilliant

discussion of the concept in a “New Testament” context, see Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*, 1995).

- A few allusions to the nature of a Good Society are made in the Bible. For example, in Isaiah 65:21, 22: “People will build houses and get to live in them—they will not be used by someone else. They will plant vineyards and enjoy the wine—it will not be drunk by others.” And in Jeremiah 31:4, 5: “Once again I will rebuild you. Once again you will take up your tambourines and dance joyfully. Once again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria, and those who plant them will eat what the vineyards produce.”

In addition, Paul’s use of a body analogy (1 Corinthians 12:12 - 26) can be interpreted as a “picture” of the Good Society—Paul’s version of the “utopian” situation (of, e.g., Isaiah 65:21, 22) referred to above. If the “picture” offered in, e.g., Isaiah is rather *individualistic* in nature, that offered by Paul is decidedly *societal*. In effect, Paul sees a society as consisting of individuals and households, with different individuals/households engaged in different tasks (a “division of labor” à la Adam Smith!), but doing so in a harmonious manner. In Paul’s view no one part (individual) is more important than another, and the implication of *that* is that the Good Society would be rather “flat”—i.e., lacking a clear hierarchy, whether of influence, status, or wealth. One could also argue that implicit in this body analogy is the idea that a society should encourage its members to develop their talents, and then use them for the benefit of others; that doing so will contribute to the further development of one’s abilities (while perhaps even adding new ones); and that by thereby gaining in competence and a sense of potency (a concept associated with psychologist Rollo May) one gains for oneself a sense of well-being. (Evidently, Paul was not trained in Economics—thus was not aware of the “fact” that materialism and selfishness are the paths to happiness!)

There is also a suggestion in this body analogy that if interaction *ceases* to become harmonious, the society itself will die. Providing us, thereby, with a warning that unless we begin to work for societal system change in the direction of increasing harmony (and, I would add, greater ecological responsibility)—we face the danger of societal collapse (and perhaps the very extinction of our species—along with numerous other ones, of course).

- Which brings us to Jesus, who is treated here as a fully-human being. After all, the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) do not have Jesus claiming otherwise. In focusing on Jesus’s *life*, as recorded in the (canonical) gospels, my interest is in particular events that demonstrate that he had an interest in the well-being of his fellows. That said, I am *not* claiming that Jesus’s “ministry” was oriented *just* to the well-being of people in the here-and-now, only that this was a *part* of his ministry:
 - Jesus, at one point, declared (Matthew 5:17) that he did not reject the Law of the Hebrew Scriptures. Given that that Law was (as we have seen) oriented to people’s well-being, this means that Jesus was saying that a prime concern of his was the well-being of people—his fellow Jews in particular.

- In stating that one should do for others as one would like done to/for oneself (the “Golden Rule,” Matthew 7:12), and then adding that this was the meaning of the Law of Moses, Jesus was stating explicitly that that Law was primarily about human well-being. That even the cultic laws played an ethical role in that such laws tended (if they “worked”!) to make one God-oriented, and thereby aware of the fact that God’s primary desire was that one be “one’s brother’s keeper.”
- Jesus recognized, however, that (Matthew 26:41) “the flesh is weak”—that it is not necessarily easy to live according to the Law (an idea that had some prominence in the thinking of Paul of Tarsus).
- In his diatribe of Matthew 23:13 – 28) he gave a brief summary of the Law—that (v. 23) its important teachings are justice, mercy, and honesty—i.e., treating one’s fellow human beings well, because that’s what God wants from us.
- Jesus’s briefest summary of the Law was that (Mark 12: 30, 31) one should love one’s neighbor as one loved oneself. In delivering this summary, Jesus was simply quoting Leviticus 19:18. The “love one another” of John 13:34 is another version of this statement.
- Another direct reference, by Jesus, to the Hebrew Scriptures is given in Matthew 9:13, where he quotes Hosea 6:6 to the effect that what God wants is kindness, not animal sacrifices.
- In Matthew 6:2 Jesus states that one should give to the needy—but not make a show of it. After all, what one has, has not come to one just through one’s own efforts; one owes much to God, and to the nature of the society that one happens to be living in.
- In Luke 6:38 Jesus declares that if one gives to others, God will give to you in return—providing here motivation for giving to others.
- In Matthew 25:31 – 46 (which calls to mind the Job passage quoted earlier, but with afterlife implications) we have Jesus’s famous “plan of salvation”: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, receive strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison—injunctions that are repeated several times for emphasis. (In the passage they are not explicitly presented as injunctions, but it is obvious that that is their intent.) In vs. 32, 33 people are divided into two groups, with (v. 46) the righteous on the right, and people on the left sent to eternal punishment, while the people on the right (i.e., those who have obeyed the injunctions) are given eternal life. (Interestingly, in John 17:3 “eternal life” is said to mean knowing God—so that it would appear that there is a conflict between these two passages.)
- The Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25 37) illustrates Jesus’s recognition that the Law is primarily about helping others, while also subtly criticizing the religious leaders of his society for failing to recognize this.

- Jesus advised his fellow Jews that (Luke 14:13, 14) when they feasted, they should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They should resist the “natural” temptation to invite only those with whom they would feel comfortable in favor of those with unmet needs: It is not what *you* want that should guide your behavior, but what *God* wants.
- Jesus protected (John 8:1 – 11) a woman caught in adultery from being stoned, demonstrating that compassion is a higher value than strict rule-following. Laws are created with a *purpose*, and if one does not comprehend that purpose one may very well act contrary to God’s fundamental law—which is that one is to love the neighbor without being judgmental.
- In the “beatitudes” of Matthew 5:3 – 11 most Bibles use the word “blessed” or “happy,” but a better translation might rather be that “You are doing God’s will if you are meek, if you hunger for justice, if you are merciful, if you are pure, in heart,” etc. That is, you should follow God’s law of love (of others) even if this means persecution or hardship on your part, and don’t necessarily expect that you will be rewarded for doing what’s right. For you may not be!—although having painful experiences now and then can be beneficial.
- The admonition of Matthew 6:19 that one should not store up riches seems to suggest that if you are greedy, and try to acquire as much as you can for yourself, you may be reducing the ability of others to obtain what *they* need. That is, your actions may have an indirect negative effect on the well-being of others—so be careful in your actions.
- In Matthew 8:3 we have Jesus healing a man, and in 8:5 – 13 we have him healing the servant of a Roman officer. This indicates that Jesus not only wanted to issue instructions to others regarding what they should do, but wanted to do what he himself could to help others.
- In John 11:38 44 we have Jesus responding to an extreme case of ill-being: he raises his friend Lazarus from the dead!
- In John 10:10 Jesus declared that he has come that we might have life, and have it in all its fullness. He was here referring to well-being, but most certainly was not saying that one gains well-being especially from the consumption of goods.
- Jesus frequently used the parable in his “ministry” as a vehicle for conveying a message. Given that a parable is a puzzle, it not only encourages thought on the part of the individual hearer, but also encourages discussion with others. Such interaction can be a significant source of well-being for the parties involved—directly and indirectly.
- Insofar as Jesus was an apocalyptic (i.e., “God is about to come down to earth, to separate the sheep from the goats”), it is not clear whether actually *believed* that God

was about to arrive (which would have been “good news” for the poor, the blind, the lame, etc.) or, rather, was using this proclamation about God as some “bad news” for members of the elite: “You had better come to understand that God’s Law is not of the “blame the victim” variety but, rather, of a “help the victim” sort—and start following that Law. Else, you may not be judged favorably when God arrives—and will need to pay the consequences.” Even if Jesus knew John the Baptizer (who may have had an Essene background)—and was his cousin—this does not *prove* that Jesus took apocalypticism seriously.

- Some scholars have noted that Jesus used humor in his ministry (e.g., Elton Trueblood, *The Humor of Christ*, 1964). This suggests that Jesus was at least dimly aware of the healing power of humor.

In conclusion, we find in many places in the Bible human well-being “held up” as what one should focus one’s life on. That not only does God want us to have a concern for our fellows—evidenced in actually acting, directly or indirectly, to contribute to their well-being. But that this is a wise course of action from a purely *selfish* standpoint: one adds to one’s own well-being by having an other-orientation (a point established by some famous research by Bernard Rimland: “The Altruism Paradox,” *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 51 [1982], p. 522. See also Chapter 14, “Selfless Pleasures,” pp. 222-37 in *Healthy Pleasures*, by Robert Ornstein and David Sobel, 1989.)

I realize that the Bible has been perceived in a variety of ways. However, my many years of reading, and reading about, the Bible have led me to the firm conclusion that the “fundamental” topic of the Bible is human well-being—that one should concern oneself regarding the well-being of others, and in doing so will contribute to one’s own. I perceive a Tradition in the Bible, with various individuals having made different sorts of contributions to that Tradition. However, I would add that this Tradition should *not* be understood as something that occurred just in “Bible times,” but has continued down to the present: What God wants of us is not so much to be “experts” *on* the Tradition but participants *in* it. *All* of us, for we all have something to offer—as Paul’s body analogy suggests.

In continuing this Tradition we need to recognize that *any* tradition, to continue in existence, must change over time. By this I do not mean to suggest that the Tradition should *accommodate* itself to existing cultures; rather, first, it should adjust its end(s)—over time and space—as seems appropriate (e.g., adding a concern for other species, and giving attention to the future, and to the prevention of problems from occurring in the first place). Second, it should develop new *means* (such as the Kingship of God Fellowship institution)—means that are appropriate given the time and place. Let us, then, comment briefly on some of the salient features of the Kingship of God Fellowship.

KGF Characteristics: Specific Features

What is a Kingship of God Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for

one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which would manifest itself as an altered state of consciousness).

Participants in a given KGF meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is *God* who chooses when selections are made at random) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one KGF session per “congregation” at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a KGF is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four KGF sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first KGF, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in the entire congregation—present at a given time—and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random procedure. This means not only that participants in a KGF do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense). Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The KGF, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a KGF all accept Jesus’s love-of-neighbor command as their central “creed,” and the KGF is expected to have a future (and prevention) orientation, the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to these expectations.

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is (perhaps) assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity. It is placed at the center of the

group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet's remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a "talking hoop" passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet's immediate left. (Another possibility is to use a rope segment—the allusion here being to John 15:5). That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during KGF sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept the truism that one person's views are as worthy of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.
- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to "speak one's truth" and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel "led" to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. While one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels "called" to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner). (Again, the Prophet needs to accept a responsibility of reprimanding those who violate this principle.)
- d. While one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that "loving the neighbor" entails allowing others to come to *their own* conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one's own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in

opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one's *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.

- f. While one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one's *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (*as Prophet*) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn't like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil's advocate” (but only when it is one's turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given KGF will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Kingship of God Fellowship are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good (is, indeed, “of God”), and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus's use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the KGF, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus's “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus's use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the KGF is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the KGF has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels—for this helps solidify in my mind my belief that the KGF is a Tradition institution.

An assumption implicit in the structured manner of discussion associated with the KGF is that the revelations from God can easily become distorted by the human vessel receiving them. Because of this possibility, the KGF takes a cue from the founders of Feeling Therapy. Those individuals realized that each was “crazy” to some degree, but that if they *jointly* developed a therapy, their individual “crazinesses” would likely get cancelled out. Likewise, an assumption of the KGF is that if revelations are sought for a *group*, and a consensus is reached by a given KGF group, those revelations can be accepted as authentic revelations.

Finally, I should note that the concept of “religious” that I associate with the Kingship of God Fellowship is one in which *the sacred* has especial importance. My hope is that the experience of being a KGF participant will, over time, result in one becoming the sort of person who begins to perceive *the sacred* in that which one comes in contact. So that in perceiving other humans, members of other species, and even natural features as *sacred*, one begins to *treat* them as such. Those of us raised in Christianity tend, it seems to me, to think of “being religious” especially in *belief* terms. I’m convinced, however, that the KGF experience will help wean one away from such an orientation—and from thinking in terms of “natural” vs “supernatural”—to one oriented to *the sacred*.

Consequences

In the interests of brevity, I will simply list a few of the significant consequences that I would associate with KGF participation (in addition to my comments in the previous paragraph):

- Creative ideas will be generated—regarding the two concerns identified at the beginning of this essay, but regarding other matters as well. That is, I expect that the Helper will play an active role in sessions.
- Because all participants will have made a contribution to the generation of those ideas, all will have a sense of ownership in them, and this will contribute to a feeling of community arising among participant members.
- Some may experience a “natural high” during sessions, and perceive this as Spirit-filling. Such an experience may spur one’s creativity, as well as enthusiasm.
- Some of the ideas generated during sessions will develop into plans of action, and the experience of participation will motivate participants to act on those plans—which actions will generally be successful, I anticipate.

I expect that participation in a Kingship of God Fellowship will have only *positive* consequences—for the participants as individuals, for the group, for the local community, for the country, for the world. Although I would hope that the KGFs established would have a future-prevention orientation, if the Spirit moves participants in some other direction during the course of a given KGF; session, that movement should not be resisted. The Holy Spirit is *invited* to sessions, and sessions are designed so as to *conduce* attracting the Holy Spirit. But we must not attempt to *control* the Holy Spirit: *When* the Spirit chooses to be present—and *how*—are up to the Holy Spirit, not us.

Continuing the Tradition: A Proposal

Alton C. Thompson, December 16, 2009

Schuyler Brown has observed (*Text and Psyche*, 1998, p. 60) that “when scripture is read aloud to a congregation, . . . there may be as many interpretations [of it] within . . . [the group] as there are members present.” And Brown’s explanation of this fact was seemingly that (p. 36): “Readers of the Bible seek to hear ‘the word of the Lord’ addressing them out of the sacred text, as they wrestle with the challenges of daily life.”

I will grant—as virtually inevitable—that different individuals hearing (or reading) a given Bible passage (*any* text, for that matter) will interpret it differently. After all, the “telephone” game often played at parties demonstrates that a message being conveyed is not *memorized* by the recipient, and then repeated verbatim. Rather, a message is *interpreted* by the recipient, and then transmitted to the next person as an interpretation—who then

But does the “average” person read the Bible *only* for the purpose of learning how God wants her to face “the challenges of daily life”? No doubt many read the Bible—and listen to Bible readings, and sermons/homilies based on those readings—with such a purpose in mind. I have often had such a purpose myself. But for a number of years now I have been developing a rather different way of “using” the Bible.

I have known for some time that the books that comprise the Bible were written at different times, and have undergone editing at various times. In addition, I have come to see the writing/editing done at any given time as having been *responsive* to (then-) contemporary events. But despite the fact of this writing and editing occurring over a long period of time, enough commonality exists in these writings to justify their inclusion in a single volume. This is not to say that political factors did not play a role in the selection process—for they clearly did. Nor is it to say that the Bible lacks diversity—for it abounds in diversity! Still, there is enough of a thread running through the books of the Bible to warrant their being bound together into a single volume.

What is that thread? The thread that *I* see is the message that God wants the beings that He created—including animals—to have well-being; and that God attributes the existence of *ill-being* to the existence of hierarchical societies.

What is their relevance as a causal factor? First, the elite in such a society tends to exploit non-elite members of the society, resulting in ill-being for many in the latter category. Second, the elite tends to be warlike, and as a consequence requires non-elite members of the society to bear arms—resulting in many of them becoming lame, blind, enslaved . . . and dead; and with widows and orphans thereby resulting. (For a fuller discussion of the key ideas presented in this paper, see my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning,” posted under the pen name James B. Gray at www.religioustolerance.org/worship.pdf.)

Now if one perceives—as I do—the Bible as providing a record, of sorts, of individuals directed by God to address (then-) contemporary problems, and one *identifies* with that record, one will quite naturally (I believe) arrive at the following conclusions:

- This record should be perceived not so much as something to (merely) *learn* about but, rather, as something from which to draw inspiration for *one's own* life.
- This record should be perceived as a *Tradition*—one that perhaps began before “Bible times,” was continued through those times, and has continued down to the present.

If one reaches these conclusions, one will then—quite naturally—next ask oneself:

- How should this Tradition be manifested today?
- What can *I* do to continue—and even extend—this Tradition?

I have answered the second question for myself in a way that requires me to say little in response to the first question, so let me begin here with my answer to the second question: I have developed (with God’s help, I would like to believe) ideas for an institution that can be a vehicle for identifying problems that exist today (including ones looming on the horizon), and addressing them. These ideas are not particularly original—but, rather, represent the joining of existing ideas and practices, and the application of some “common sense.” I refer to this institution as a *Kingship of God Fellowship* (KGF), using here the word “*kingship*” rather than “*kingdom*” in deference to those scholars who argue that the words commonly translated as “kingdom of God” refer to God’s *rulership*, not a *place* where God rules.

I would add that *I* interpret God’s “rulership” as occurring, not in a literal sense but, rather, in the sense that it occurs when people heed God’s Word; that the Word to heed is that which arrives to us via *current* revelation (rather than the revelation associated with the Bible)—a view that I have borrowed from the Quakers; *and* that the Kingship of God Fellowship can be a vessel for receiving God’s Word for us today (whether the “us” here is citizens of the United States or some other country). It should be unnecessary to add that unless one believes that “God is dead,” one will give priority to present-day revelation for God’s Word, with the Bible playing a secondary role.

One point emphasized by Schuyler Brown in his book is that (p. 25) the Bible has an “uncanny power . . . to transform human lives.” I do not disagree with this claim, but must admit that I perceive the KGF as somewhat of a “Bible substitute” in this case. That is, I believe that participation in KGF sessions can be a numinous (i.e., “spiritual,” “uplifting”) experience. Not always, and not for everyone; but for some, at least some of the time. This is not to say that there are not other paths to numinous experiences (such as Brown’s Bible reading). It *is* to assert, however, that the KGF provides a path that is particularly appropriate for our society, and the present.

Our society because voluntary associations have long played a significant role in our society (as, e.g., Alexis de Tocqueville noted while traveling, with Gustave de Beaumont) in this country in 1831 – 1832). *The present* because of the increasing “orality” of our society—at least in the sense that we are becoming a nation of listeners, as television comes to dominate our lives ever more.

In that I see the possibility of KGF participants having numinous experiences, I foresee that a consequence of KGF participation will be that of beginning to perceive other people, other species, and even natural features, as *sacred*. Insofar as *that* occurs, participants will realize a lessening in control of materialistic, reductionistic, “free enterprise,” etc. assumptions over their thinking. They will thereby begin to *behave* differently relative to “the other.” Will, in fact, behave in accordance with the highest ethical standards—whether found in the Bible or elsewhere. And will recognize that although there is an abundance of problems “out there” that need to be addressed in the here-and-now, there are also problems—potentially catastrophic ones, in fact—looming on the horizon (such as “global warming,” passing the “peak oil” point, and nuclear proliferation).

I am merely *hypothesizing* that KGF participation will have consequences such as those mentioned above—I cannot offer definitive proof regarding this matter. However, if, after having read about the KGF below, you find this institution attractive, I encourage you to initiate one—and see for yourself whether it has the sorts of consequences that I have associated with it. I would hope, in fact, that it would have those consequences plus many other positive ones!

KGF Characteristics: Specific Features

What is a Kingship of God Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727). It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that discussion is structured, and its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience an altered state of consciousness (possibly interpreted by some as Spirit-indwelling).

Participants in a given KGF meet at a specified place (e.g., in a church building) on a regular (or not) basis. When they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”); they write their name on the slip, and next give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is *God* who chooses when selections are made at random) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one KGF session per “congregation” at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a KGF is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four KGF sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first KGF, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/r!(n-r)!$, where n is the number of others in the entire congregation—present at a given time—and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of a random procedure. This means not only that participants in a KGF do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal sense). Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The KGF, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a KGF are all expected to accept Jesus’s love-of-neighbor command as their central “creed” (and to interpret “neighbor” as including those not now living—down to “the seventh generation”), the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to these expectations.

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they should be seated in a circle, and a single candle is (perhaps) assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity. It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop” passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the Prophet’s immediate left. (Another possibility is to use a rope segment—the allusion here being to John 15:5). That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during KGF sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above-stated premises and conclusions—at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept

the truism that one person's views are as worthy of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.

- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one’s truth” and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. While one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner). (Again, the Prophet needs to accept a responsibility of reprimanding those who violate this principle.)
- d. While one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to *their own* conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. While one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
- g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (*as Prophet*) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
- h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
- i. There is always the possibility that some who join a given KGF will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting

any member will have the right to call for an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the meeting—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given group (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Kingship of God Fellowship are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good (is, indeed, “of God”), and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the KGF, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels and use, by us moderns, of the KGF is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the KGF has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels—for this helps solidify in my mind my belief that the KGF is a Tradition institution.

An assumption implicit in the structured manner of discussion associated with the KGF is that the revelations from God can easily become distorted by the human vessel receiving them. Because of this possibility, the KGF takes a cue from the founders of Feeling Therapy. Those individuals realized that each was “crazy” to some degree, but that if they *jointly* developed a therapy, their individual “crazinesses” would likely get cancelled out. Likewise, an assumption of the KGF is that if revelations are received by a *group*, those revelations can be accepted as authentic ones.

Consequences

In the interests of brevity, I will simply list a few of the significant consequences that I would associate with KGF participation (in addition to those already mentioned):

- Creative ideas will be generated—regarding the two concerns identified at the beginning of this essay, but regarding other matters as well. That is, I expect that the Helper (mentioned in John’s gospel) will play an active role in sessions.
- Because all participants will have made a contribution to the generation of those ideas, all will have a sense of ownership in them, and this will contribute to a feeling of community arising among participant members.
- Some may experience a “natural high” during sessions, and perceive this as Spirit-filling. Such an experience may spur one’s creativity, as well as enthusiasm.

- Some of the ideas generated during sessions will develop into plans of action, and the experience of participation will motivate participants to act on those plans—which actions will generally be successful, I anticipate.

I expect that participation in a Kingship of God Fellowship will have only *positive* consequences—for the participants as individuals, for the group, for the local community, for the country, for the world. If you see potential in the KGF, please consider initiating one!

January 13, 2010

What Path Should We Follow?

Alton C. Thompson

The title of Ralph Nader's recent book—“*Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!*”—(a novel; Nader, 2009) leads me to ask myself three questions:

- *What* needs to be done?
- *Why*—i.e., for what end(s)?
- By what *means*?

Not having yet read the book (only reviews of it), I cannot comment—one way or another—on the answers that Mr. Nader provides to those questions. I can state, however, that I agree with the statement in the title of the book that only the super-rich can save us. Whether my ideas regarding that which we need to be saved from coincide with those of Mr. Nader, is something that I lack a clear opinion on at present. Those who *have* read the book will need to make their own judgments on this matter.

What Needs to Be Done?

My answer to this question has much in common with that provided by Charles Fourier [1772 – 1837], whose ideas inspired the creation of a settlement in my home state—that of Ceresco, now Ripon, Wisconsin (which claims to be the birthplace of the Republican Party). Ironically, the implementation of my answer has much in common with not only that provided by Mr. Nader, but by Mr. Fourier as well—for I look to the wealthy for our “salvation.”

Fourier (whose ideas were publicized in this country by Albert Brisbane, via Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*) proposed the conversion of societies into small settlements centered on *phalanstères* (or phalanxes)—i.e., “grand hotels.” A central idea of Fourier was that humans were endowed with 12 “passions” (what we might loosely interpret as “needs”), and that different combinations of them resulted in 810 possible types of “character.” Fourier then used these assumptions to argue that the ideal settlement would contain two individuals of each type—for a total of 1610 individuals. (Beecher, 1986)

(“In 1826, Charles Fourier had announced in notices in the Paris press that he would be home every day in Saint-Pierre-Montmartre from twelve to two in the afternoon, to explain his social reform projects to noble-minded and justice-seeking industrialists or persons of independent means interested in providing financial assistance. Eleven years later, on the day of his death in 1837, the goodhearted old man with kindly blue eyes, in his eternal black frock coat and white tie . . . was still waiting punctually from twelve to two for the visit that never came. Never! Not a single rich man, not a single bourgeois, took the trouble to go to ask him questions or listen to his plans for ending human suffering.” [Llosa, 2004, p. 78.] If such a scene is repeated today, I fear that humankind is doomed—if not as a result of “global warming,” then from Earth's having

now passed the “peak oil” point of production.) (For the latter see, e.g., Matt Savinar’s www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net.)

This is not the place to describe the reasoning behind Fourier’s proposal, or to note details regarding it. Rather, I will simply note that (1) I agree with Fourier’s conclusion that our society (along with others, of course) needs to be moved in a communitarian direction, and, like Fourier, (2) identify goals for such communities (analogous to Fourier’s “passions”)—goals pertaining to human well-being. In doing so let me first state that I recognize that certain material things are necessary to survival as well as some modicum of comfort. I would insist, however, that the primary sources of well-being lie elsewhere:

- The human species is one of those species that falls into the category “social.” Indeed, not only do most humans have an innate *desire* to be with other humans; they have a *need* so to be: if, upon birth, one is abandoned, one is likely to die within a few days, even if not killed by a predator; if one is provided care by members of another species (a rare, but not unknown, occurrence) one will not develop into a recognizably human being (rather, one will become a “feral” being).
- Humans have a need to be a part of a small group—e.g., one no more than about 500 persons in size. (See, e.g., Sale’s 1980 huge book on the virtues of smallness!.) A “group” here should be understood as not merely a collection of individuals (i.e., a group in a *statistical* sense) but, rather, a set of individuals who interact one with another (i.e., a *sociological* group)—so that each person knows virtually all other members of the group.
- It is not enough (for a high level of well-being) simply to be a member of a small group, however. Harmonious relationships must characterize the group. This does not mean that all interactions within the group are conflict-free; it *does* mean, however, that when conflicts arise, that fact is of concern to other members of the group—who then “naturally” act to defuse the conflict. That is, there is unconscious “recognition” within the group that all have a stake in harmonious relationships, so that the social fabric must not be allowed to become torn. Given this perception of conflict, when offenses occur, the point becomes to re-integrate the offender into the societal system again rather than inflict punishment—although at times that (and even banishment) may be called for.
- Healthy interaction involves such activities as conversing with others as equals (and in a manner such that individual views are welcomed and respected—rather than treated as, e.g., “heretical”); working together with others to provide sustenance (or other) needs; recreating together; and participating in certain rituals or ceremonies together.
- We humans are “designed” for physical activity, and must have a certain amount of it for good physical and mental health. Physical activity can be associated not only with work, but also play—and includes sexual activity. The latter, of course, will tend to be more strictly guided by mores established by the group than the other activities. (For a “design” perspective on humans see Pugh, 1977.)

- In working with others one must feel that one is making a contribution to the group—that one is not a “slacker.” Conversely, one must perceive *others* in the group as at least attempting to make a contribution to the group.
- Related to this point, however, one must feel that one’s contribution is one that “fits” one—in terms of one’s abilities, interests, etc.
- Also, in acting as an individual, one must feel that one is a decision-maker, not just acting out of blind habit or doing the bidding of others. (See, e.g., Howes and Moon, 1973.) One mark of a healthy interactional situation, in fact, is that all members of the group perceive (if but unconsciously) themselves this way, and feel that they have the respect of other members of the group.
- A final need that I would mention is extended periods of close contact with the “surround.” Our distant ancestors, of course, had constant contact with the surround, and not only did this contribute to their well-being, it affected their mode of thinking. During many of their awake hours their minds were absorbed in the surround, and their perceptions were not “translated” into words—including words merely thought, rather than spoken. And when such translation *did* occur, the thought that occurred was primarily of an *idiographic* nature—i.e., oriented to *particular* facts. The “primitives” *did* make generalizations—and were, in fact, excellent “observational scientists” (as anthropologists have discovered). *Nomothetic* thinking (i.e., that oriented to generalizations), however, played a much smaller role in their thinking than it does in ours. “Historical” thinking also played a role in “primitive” life, but primarily served an explanatory role, and took the form of stories (what we arrogant moderns tend to term “myths”). The historical thinking that is characteristic in *our* society, on the other hand, takes the form of narratives that purport to recount events that “actually” took place; and although historical explanations are not unknown in our society, they are much less common than is the case in “primitive” societies.

In brief, then, *what* needs to be done is to work at moving our society in the direction of one consisting primarily of small communities (*eco*-communities, I should add), with these communities being designed (by their inhabitants, not “experts”) with the above sorts of criteria in mind.

Why Should This Be Done?

Ours is a “large-scale” society, and as such inevitably will have problems (whether it is capitalistic, socialistic, or whatever). Here is a partial list of our problems:

- Unemployment is a huge problem—as are under-employment and ill-employment.
- Many in our society are homeless—and not because of personal flaws.
- Many are insecure in their jobs.
- Many find their work experience stressful.

- Remuneration is very unfair: those who have the highest incomes are basically parasites (i.e., individuals who receive of the bounty of the economy, but add nothing of value)—or even predators (i.e., individuals who are not only parasites, but receive via actively exploiting others)—who may even engage in activities that damage the economy, while bringing profit to themselves. Yet these individuals do not perceive themselves this way, nor are they generally so perceived.
- Too many in our society are greedy—they are constantly pursuing more and more.
- Selfishness is common—especially with those who have the most. Individuals may be willing to give to members of their families, and put on lavish parties for their “friends,” but are reluctant to help others in need: “If others are in need, they have brought this condition on themselves through laziness and the development of bad habits.”
- Our society has become materialistic: people value things especially, and want ever more things, especially *new* things. Note here that the attachment here is not so much to *specific* items but things *per se*.
- Our society is materialistic in part because our valuing “equality of opportunity” means that we value “success”—which we tend to interpret in materialistic terms..
- Not only is this not a society of equality of opportunity (as is often claimed—at least as a value); it is becoming ever more a society of extreme inequality in condition.
- Divorce is far too common, and a cause of problems for women and children.
- Alcoholism is a problem—for those with the problem, family members, and others with whom alcoholics have contact..
- For too many in our society (illegal) drug use is a problem.
- Spousal abuse occurs all too frequently.
- There is abuse of children—physically, emotionally, sexually.
- Violence against others—muggings, killings—occurs much too often.
- Suicides occur.
- The press is very superficial in its presentation of the “news.”
- There are too many attempts to manipulation how we think—by commercials, by “think tanks,” etc.

- Too many people are willing to prostitute their talents in service of the business-financial elite.
- Our religious institutions are captive to the dominant economic interests.
- Our way of life is unnatural.
- Diseases—physical and mental—are a problem. The fact that our way of life is unnatural is a major cause of these diseases.
- Our way of life is polluting—e.g., contributing to “global warming.”
- Many deny that global warming is occurring (convinced by propaganda financed by rich right-wing individuals/organizations), and fight efforts to address the problem.
- We are at, or very near, the “peak oil” point of annual production—which has dire implications for oil prices and (therefore) the health of our economy/society.
- Politicians are controlled by lobbyists rather than expressing the public’s will.
- We support corrupt, undemocratic, rogue regimes abroad.
- We institute wars that are unconstitutional, that result in tremendous loss of life—and that benefit only certain industries-firms. Yet we claim that our military people are “fighting for our freedoms”—and the average person believes this nonsense.
- We interfere in the affairs of other countries—rigging elections, spreading disinformation, assassinating leaders, etc.

Anthropologist John H. Bodley (2003, p. 66) has recently noted that as “the scale of human societies increases, at least five things are likely to happen:

(1) per capita economic productivity and consumption increases, but the product become more inequitably distributed;

(2) democracy declines, because decision making becomes more cumbersome and more concentrated;

(3) institutions and technologies become more specialized, more complex, more costly, and more vulnerable;

(4) the pace of change and instability increases; and

(5) all types of social power become more concentrated.”

And in earlier works Prof. Bodley indirectly associated many of the problems that I listed above with societal scale.

I do not disagree with Bodley that numerous problems can be related, causally, to scale, but would point out that scale is not an “uncaused cause.” Rather, I would argue, increasing scale is but one of the consequences associated with the “discrepancy” (Barash, 1977, pp. 318 - 324). Which, then, raises the question: What *is* this “discrepancy” to which I have referred?

The basis for this concept is that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago humans developed as biological entities in response to certain selection mechanisms (but *not* including Darwinian “natural selection”); and that simultaneously a gatherer-hunter way of life was developed by humans. The latter was developed in a manner that was in accord with the biological characteristics that were developing, in conjunction with characteristics of the physical environment. (Insofar as the latter varied from place to place, so did details of the gatherer-hunter way of life, of course.) Put another way, a “fit” emerged between humans as biological entities and the gatherer-hunter way of life that they lived. (Relevant works here include Shepard, 1998, and Boaz, 2002.)

This “fit” was disturbed by the Agricultural Revolution, however. For changes in way of life were associated with that Revolution (for whatever reasons), whereas human biology remained basically unchanged. As a result, a “discrepancy” began to arise between (1) the way of life for which humans had become “designed” and (2) the way of life they were actually living. The *direct* results of this change were that humans began to:

- Be exposed to a different set of stimuli.
- Engage in a different set of behaviors.
- Ingest a different set of substances.
- Use their brains differently.
- Have a different emotional life.
- Etc.

In other words, more and more did humans develop ways of life that were not “in tune” with their biological natures. The results of this increasing “discrepancy” have not been documented well to date (and likely never will be!). However, **there is good reason for believing that virtually all of our problems as humans are traceable back to this “discrepancy.”**

Given that our biological natures arose during that phase in our development as humans when we lived in small groups, it is perfectly understandable why Prof. Bodley has reached the conclusions he has regarding how human problems are related to societal scale. And the obvious conclusion—of a proposal sort—to draw from his research is that if those problems are to recede into the background, it will be necessary for us humans to “return” to smaller-scale living. That is, it will be necessary to convert out society into some sort of confederation of small

communities. I would add that those communities need to be designed with above-mentioned criteria in mind—and also be eco-communities. (I should add that in an internet posting—under the name James B. Gray [2007]—I propose an institution that can lead to the realization of the goals identified in this essay.)

This assertion is not, of course, a generally-accepted one. “Conservatives” tend to believe—foolishly—that “the market” will solve all of our problems; and “liberals” tend to believe—equally foolishly—that governments, because of their supposed “general welfare” responsibilities, will act to solve our problems. Both views are, of course, abysmally ignorant and naïve.

By What Means?

It is not only foolish—but dangerously so—to look either to “the market” or to governments for our salvation. We will be “saved”—if at all (certainly there are no guarantees here)—only by the actions of private individuals-organizations—ones like the ones in Nader’s novel, who not only are enlightened, but have wealth. Their goal should be to facilitate movement of our society in an eco-communitarian direction (such that human “design specifications” are met in these communities, and the way of life has a light “footprint” on Earth). I should add that in doing so they might consider following the strategy that I presented a quarter century ago (Thompson, 1984). (I have since updated that article, but have not attempted to publish it. If, however, you would like a copy of it, e-mail me at A.Thompson@Astronautics.com.)

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Note on the Author: The author was a History major as an undergraduate, received a M.A. in Geography from the University of North Carolina, and a Ph. D. in Urban Economic Geography from the University of Cincinnati. For the past 23 years he has been an employee with an engineering (avionics) firm in Milwaukee. As a father (three children) and grandfather (three children), he sees a rather bleak future for his descendants—unless societal system change occurs here and elsewhere, soon and rapidly; but, frankly, lacks the optimism of, e.g., Mr. Nader.

January 19, 2010

The Progressive Christian

Alton C. Thompson

The label “Progressive Christian” is somewhat of a misnomer in that neither “Christian” nor “Progressive” has a literal meaning for the Progressive Christian, for such a person:

- Does not regard Jesus as having been a/the Christ (i.e., Messiah).
- Does not make Jesus the center of his religion (nor regard Jesus as a supernatural being who now “sits at the right hand of God”).
- Is more accurately described as a “Regressive” than a “Progressive.”

Instead of having a religion focused on a particular historical person (i.e., Jesus), the Progressive Christian gives that honor to a particular *Tradition*. A Progressive Christian:

- Perceives the (“Christian”) Bible as providing—among other things—a record of that Tradition. Conversely, his interest in the Bible is largely limited to that record (i.e., the “wheat” of the Bible).
- Believes that the Tradition began before “Bible times,” and did not end with the end of those times.
- Knows that that Tradition—to maintain its integrity—has needed to change in character over time, rather than remaining stagnant.
- Also knows, however, that through history the *end* associated with the Tradition has been well-being. And that in recent decades there has been a need to expand the meaning of that end to include species in addition to our own; and to add “survival” to the meaning of “well-being.” What this expansion recognizes is the need to adopt an ecological perspective—a perspective that recognizes our dependence on other species, and our capability of modifying our environment. A capability whose negative implications are becoming ever more clear to those with eyes to see.

I used the word “history” above deliberately because the Tradition in question has had a *raison d’être* only during historical time—that time having begun with the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago (i.e., the beginning of “civilization”). And the causal “event” associated with that Revolution (so far as the Tradition is concerned) was the emergence of a “discrepancy” (David Barash).

What is that “discrepancy”? First, some background information:

Prior to the Agricultural Revolution the humans that existed were among those species that had a gatherer-hunter way of life. This way of life varied in its details, of course, from species to species, and from place to place (as the environment varied).

As biological entities, humans did not remain static during this period. They developed biologically in response to various selection mechanisms such as environmental change (Steven Stanley), predation (Robert Sussman), and sexual selection (Nancy Makepeace Tanner)—but *not* Darwinian “natural selection.”

As humans developed biologically—to the point of having the characteristics they do today—so did the details of their way(s) of life (using “way(s)” here to recognize that ways of life varied somewhat from place to place in response to environmental variation). That development occurred, however, not in a random way but, rather, in a “fitness” direction:

- Humans as biological entities came to “fit” their way of life—which, in turn, came to fit the local environment. (Although humans came to differ one from another from place to place, these differences were not major enough to warrant their categorization into different species.)
- The way of life of humans came to fit not only the local environment, but the humans practicing it.

The congruence between humans as biological entities, their way(s) of life, and the environment that existed just prior to the Agricultural Revolution was, however, disturbed by that Revolution. For whereas a result of that Revolution was changes in ways of life (for whatever reasons), such changes were not accompanied by significant changes in human biology. There arose, then, an increasing “discrepancy” between the way of life for which a given group had become “designed” (via the operation of selection mechanisms) and the way of life its members were required to live. That is, the way of life of a given group became more and more “unnatural.”

The development of “civilization” influenced different members of a given group differently because one of the marks of a “civilized” society is the existence of a class/caste system within the society—a new phenomenon on the human stage. Still, we can generalize by stating that for a given society all members were:

- Now being exposed to a different set of stimuli.
- Engaging in a different set of behaviors.
- Ingesting a different set of substances.
- Beginning to use their brains differently.
- Beginning to have a different emotional life.
- Etc.

In other words, every member of a “civilizing” society was beginning to have a way of life that was every more “unnatural.” But because such societies were developing class/caste social systems, different members of a given such society were being affected differently from a well-being standpoint. However, even though some were benefiting more than others from a consumption standpoint, not even members of the elite had a “healthy” way of life (defined broadly), for their way of life was merely “unnatural” in a different manner from the way of life of those at the bottom of the social pyramid.

It is likely that virtually all of the problems that currently face us as humans could be traced to this Discrepancy—if scholars were willing to undertake the necessary research. What is of interest for the present essay, however, is that it is not just our problems which are rooted in the Discrepancy; that the Tradition also has its roots in it. Thus, contrary to the widespread “theory” that the Bible has a supernatural origin in some sense, the (probable) truth of the matter is that it has its basis in the Discrepancy. It is true that the Bible contains much more than Tradition material; it is probable, however, that had that Tradition not developed—with some of it being recorded in the Bible—the Bible itself would never have been written. At any rate, if one takes Tradition material away from the Bible (as Thomas Jefferson did somewhat in creating his Bible), one has little left of lasting value.

I have examined the Bible elsewhere (www.religioustolerance.org/worship.pdf under the name James B. Gray) from a Tradition perspective, thus will not repeat myself here. Rather, I would like to make two points for the benefit of those—whether they call themselves “Progressive Christians” or whatever—who see themselves as participants in the Tradition today.

First, although there is a continuing need for us to follow Jesus’s “plan of salvation” (for that’s what it is!) of giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, etc., (as the current situation in Haiti demonstrates) there is an even more pressing need at present to adopt a long-run—and preventive—orientation in our thinking. First, there is good reason for believing that this year is the “peak oil” year for oil production from a world standpoint (see, for example, physicist David L. Goodstein’s www.its.caltech.edu/~dg/Essay2.pdf). Given that we do not yet have adequate substitutes for oil (as energy sources), the implication is that that fact in conjunction with an increasing world population will result in skyrocketing fuel costs—with resulting economic-societal chaos.

If that’s not enough, our continued reliance on oil as a source of energy (not just, e.g., lubricant) means that we are continuing to pour carbon dioxide into the atmosphere—and thereby cause “global warming.” The danger here is that that fact—in conjunction with rising world population—threatens the “negative feedback” mechanisms that have been keeping the world’s temperature relatively stable. There are already signs that those mechanisms are being replaced by “positive feedback” mechanisms—which portend disaster for not only our species, but many other species as well. Dr. James Hansen of NASA has been warning us for a number of years now that unless we act soon, our future is a question mark. It is time that we began listening to him.

What should we do? In the “Gray” paper cited earlier I introduce the “New Word Fellowship” (NeWF) as an institution for—among other things—generating ideas regarding what to do, thus there is no need to repeat here what I wrote in that paper. Here, I would add just two points.

First, I suggest that those who now refer to themselves as “Progressive Christians” come to think of themselves as “NeWFians”—i.e., people who make the NeWF as the centerpiece of their “worship.” The advantages of dropping the word “Christian” are that that is an obsolete term, as well as one that connotes an undesirable exclusivity.

Second, although I note, regarding a NeWF, that its participants must be allowed to speak about that which they feel “led” to speak, participants in any given NeWF should resolve to focus primarily on the problems (such as “global warming” and passing the “peak oil” point) that are on the horizon rather than those that are of a here-and-now nature.

January 26, 2010

Is There Reason for Hope?

Alton C. Thompson

For most readers of *The Progressive* there is, I suspect, a certain equivalency between the January 12 earthquake in Haiti and the January 21 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision of the U. S. Supreme Court: both were disasters. I, however, would go beyond that conclusion and argue that they were *related* disasters.

Not, of course, in the sense that the January 12 disaster *caused* the January 21 one. Rather, in the sense that the January 21 decision may very well eventuate in a disaster *comparable* to (but not identical with) the January 12 one—but on a *global* scale. In a sense, then, I see the January 12 disaster not only as a horrible human tragedy, but as a sort of parable—a prediction of *(hu)man*-made disasters on the near horizon (beyond those attributable to “disaster capitalism” measures introduced into Haiti and elsewhere).

I would guess that Sheldon S. Wolin (*Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, 2008) is reacting to the *Citizens* decision with a strengthened view that (p. xvi) “certain tendencies in our society point in the direction away from self-government, the rule of law, egalitarianism, and thoughtful public discussion” And I suspect that most readers of *The Progressive* would agree with Wolin on this matter—certainly I do. However, I believe that the implications of the Court’s decision are even more ominous than those that I have attributed to Wolin. For I believe that:

- Despite the fact that we are moving somewhat in a “green” direction, most corporations lack enthusiasm for, and commitment to, such a direction.
- As a consequence, the consumption (direct and indirect) of oil will continue—for several years at least.
- So that “global warming” will continue to increase—perhaps to a point where “runaway” begins (i.e., the negative feedback mechanisms that have been acting to maintain relative stability with give way to positive feedback mechanisms).
- At some point—perhaps even before “runaway” occurs—the “peak oil” point of world production will be reached. (Some experts say that that point has already been reached!)
- Meaning that—given a rising world population—oil prices will begin to rise dramatically.
- Because adequate substitutes for oil (that are also “safe”) will not be developed quickly enough to satisfy the growing demand.

There is, then, the possibility that the price of oil will soon begin to increase rapidly; and there is the possibility that although *that* may cause a decrease in the per capita and absolute level of oil

consumption, climatic “runaway” may begin to occur—if it has not already begun to occur. In either case, the results will be catastrophic for our economy and society (and other economies-societies as well, of course). And if scientist James Lovelock (of Gaia hypothesis fame) is to be believed, the human species will be virtually extinct by 2100. (Certainly many existing species will be gone by that year, it appears.)

Even if these events do not occur, it is clear that the drift of our society is not one that our Founding Fathers would approve. For not only are intelligence and education losing their place in governmental decision-making; we are in the process of losing our very humanity.

Is there a way out? It’s clear that the road of politics is not one that will lead to a reclamation of “government by the people and for the people,” or our humanity: even if our district method for selecting legislators were replaced by proportional representation systems, this would not solve the problem of “special interest” control of our political institutions—including the Supreme Court.

If it’s clear that the road of politics is a road to nowhere (by which I do not mean “utopia”!), it’s also clear that for all of the anger currently being expressed by “the voter,” the truth of the matter is that that anger will have no important results. For those who are expressing it are (with rare exceptions) unable to see beyond the existing societal structure—including its political institutions.

Ralph Nader is likely correct in stating that “Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us”—although my preference is that Native Americans use some of the monies gained through the operation of their gaming enterprises to provide the necessary funding, and also provide salvific leadership. But a question more basic than *who* can save us is the question of *what is it that’s necessary to be done*. And on this question I depart rather substantially from Nader—for my basic assumption is that only *societal system change* (of the right sort) will save us. Save us from becoming humanoids—and save us from becoming extinct (assuming the latter possible).

My starting point in discussing societal system change is to argue that prior to the Agricultural Revolution (of 10,000 years ago) the humans that existed were among those species that had a gatherer-hunter way of life. This way of life varied in its details, of course, from species to species, and from place to place (as the environment varied).

As biological entities, humans did not remain static during this period. They developed biologically in response to various selection mechanisms such as environmental change (Steven Stanley), predation (Robert Sussman), and sexual selection (Adrienne Zihlman and Nancy Makepeace Tanner)—but *not* Darwinian “natural selection.”

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The development of “civilization” influenced different members of a given group differently because one of the marks of a “civilized” society is the existence of a class/caste system within the society—a new phenomenon on the human stage. Still, we can generalize by stating that for a given “civilized” society all members were:

- Now being exposed to a different set of stimuli.
- Engaging in a different set of behaviors.
- Ingesting a different set of substances.
- Beginning to use their brains differently.
- Beginning to have a different emotional life.
- Etc.

Likely, virtually all of the current problems of humans are traceable back to this “discrepancy,” but my purpose here is not to argue *that* point. Rather, it is that in building a New Order it is considerations such as these—along with ecological principles—that should be given primary consideration.

Although I have ideas regarding a desirable “shape” for a New Society, I think it best not to go beyond the list that I have provided above. My rationale: A number of years ago I had occasion to read fairly extensively in the management literature, and recall an account of a management consultant who had been hired to develop work procedures for a company. He did so, and those procedures worked beautifully.

At a later point he was hired for the same basic purpose by a second company, and was tempted to propose the same procedures for that company as he had done for the first one. As he

reflected on this temptation, however, he came to the conclusion that the main reason his suggestions were working so well at the first company is that he had enlisted the help of that company's employees in developing the procedures. It was the fact that the employees therefore had an *investment* in the procedures that made them work, he concluded. As a consequence, rather than simply suggesting the procedures worked out for the first company to the second company, he used the same approach with that company's employees—and again met with success.

By the same token, I refuse to plan *for* people, for I have confidence that people can plan for themselves—and that the plans they develop will work out well precisely because of that fact.

There is one exception that I will make, however. In my “Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning” (written under the name James B. Gray, and available at www.religioustolerance.org/worship.pdf) I present an institution that I refer to as a New Word Fellowship. I present it as a religious institution, but it need not be so regarded—and can, therefore, be given a different name by those who wish so to do. (“A rose by any other name”) I suggest this institution as a vehicle for developing plans, while simultaneously providing a multitude of positive consequences beyond that of good ideas.

What remains is for someone with the interest and resources to initiate a movement that uses this institution as a vehicle for ushering in a New Order—beginning in the United States. Will such a person (or group) step forward?

The author—whose heroes are Prince Peter Kropotkin and Thorstein Veblen—is employed with an engineering (avionics) firm in Milwaukee.

Avatar's Happy Ending

by Alton C. Thompson

The thought processes stimulated by a movie (or article, book, etc.) depend not only on the intentions of the script-writer and/or producer, but also on the interests, education, etc., of the viewer. My recent viewing of *Avatar* stimulated—for me, at least—the following thought stream:

Nature can be perceived as a system of “taking from,” with this “taking” occurring at a rather constant rate, *ceteris paribus*. This “taking,” however, tends to be accompanied by replenishment—so that the “taking” does not result in depletion. For example, plants “take” nutrients from the soil, but chemical decomposition (and annual silting in some cases) helps the soil from becoming depleted. Some animals eat part of plants; but because they “control” their numbers, their “taking” tends to be relatively constant from year to year. And *that* fact, combined with the fact that plant growth continues, means that the plant material available for consumption tends to remain relatively constant over time.

Other animals subsist on the flesh of still other animals. But because members of the first species “control” their numbers, members of a given group of the species eat about the same amount of flesh each year—being able to do so by the fact that the animals eaten tend to replenish their numbers, thereby maintaining relative constancy in *their* numbers. Finally, so-called “primitives” (such as the indigenous “people” in *Avatar*) have tended to subsist on a combination of plant material and animal flesh. Because they also have tended to “control” their numbers, they also have tended to fit into the ecological systems that they have made their homes, and have posed little or no threat to the continued existence of those systems.

One fact—of contemporary significance—illustrated by “primitive” peoples is that a society that relies on humans and animals as sources of energy to accomplish tasks can continue in existence indefinitely—unless, e.g., geologic change affects their sustenance opportunities adversely. Or the U. S. military enters the picture! Even if (after the “harnessing” of fire) a society becomes dependent on wood as an energy source, it can continue in existence indefinitely—so long as it does not use the wood within a given area more rapidly than the replenishment rate for that area. I should also note that the burning of wood (a renewable resource) involves no net gain in the addition of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere: as the wood was growing, it was absorbing carbon dioxide; and when it is burned, it merely releases (most of that) carbon back into the atmosphere again.

A society that becomes dependent on fossil fuels (e.g., petroleum, coal, natural gas) is, however, a different sort of animal—a “take only” society. For there are two sorts of problems especially that arise for such a society: one is related to the fact that such fuels are non-renewable; the second stems from the fact that the burning of these fuels involves the removal of carbon which had been safely buried under the earth’s surface, and transferring it to the atmosphere—thereby increasing the concentration of carbon dioxide (and other “greenhouse” gases) in the atmosphere.

Given that fossil fuels are non-renewable, the typical production history for a given deposit can be described by a “bell” curve (i.e., “normal” distribution). That is, production begins at a low

rate, the rate of extraction begins to increase rapidly, then more slowly—until production begins to decline, precipitously initially, then more gradually.

This pattern that has been found for individual deposits applies at other scales as well—including the global scale. In fact, some petroleum experts are now predicting that the “peak oil” point of world production has either been reached, or is about to be reached. In fact, just a few days ago I received an e-mail from one of these experts, who not only expressed this view, but added that he is deeply concerned about likely effects. For a rising world population means an increase in the demand for petroleum. And although that fact can be expected to cause oil companies to begin extracting oil from sources that are more difficult to work, the price of oil will likely begin to soar within a few years—resulting in chaotic conditions within many economies, including our own.

If a smooth transition to alternate sources of energy (e.g., biofuels) were foreseeable, there would be less to worry about—especially if we had some confidence that population growth would cease. But the fact that we are currently fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proves that we are much more interested in continuing to use oil than to develop alternate—and safe—energy sources. Just think of the progress that we might be making in this direction if the tax dollars currently used to fight these wars were instead devoted to sponsoring research to develop alternate sources of energy! And think also of the lives saved, of course!

The second problem associated with the use of fossil fuels is that of “global warming”—a process that tends to feed on itself. The burning of fossil fuels results in “greenhouse” gases being poured into the atmosphere, resulting in their increasing concentration there—that resulting not only in a trend in rise of the global mean, but increased storminess, more severe storms, and increasingly erratic—thus unpredictable—weather conditions. The latter has implications, of course, for flooding, fires, diseases, and interruptions in the food supply.

As the global mean temperature trends upward, the increased heating itself tends to cause *more* heating (as “positive feedback” mechanisms begin to replace “negative feedback” ones). For example, as warming occurs in the higher latitudes, permafrost begins to thaw, thereby releasing methane—a greenhouse gas much more potent than carbon dioxide. Thus, a process of “runaway” begins—and once begun, it may be unstoppable. Indeed, noted scientist James Lovelock (of “Gaia hypothesis” fame) has recently predicted that the human species will be virtually extinct by 2100 CE. (And other scientists predict that the majority of species now existing will be extinct by that time.)

If the possible consequences for humans resulting from passing the “peak oil” point are serious, then the possible consequences of “global warming” are dire! And an important point to keep in mind regarding “global warming” is that even if all humans would *tomorrow* cease adding (directly and indirectly) greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, the gases already there would continue to have an effect for decades. For their concentration in the atmosphere would not drop drastically shortly after this (fictitious—indeed, impossible) cessation, but only gradually.

We “advanced” peoples have killed most of the world’s indigenous people, but those remaining may have the last laugh. For it would seem that if anyone has a good chance of surviving the consequences of global warming, it would be such peoples.

Currently I am reading a book (Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities*, 2004) that focuses especially on the “green” movement in Sweden, and am impressed with the willingness—and creativity—of the Swedes in embracing “green” ideas and practices. If the United States (and China, India, etc.) had the same level of commitment to such ideas/practices as the Swedes, I would have some degree of optimism for our future. But given our priorities of fighting wars for oil, attacking science, and denying that we have problems, I have little reason for any degree of optimism.

Ralph Nader may be correct in asserting that “only the super-rich can save us.” But just because they have the *means* to support important efforts, it does not follow that they will *use* their money and influence to change the direction of our society’s development. Recently, for example, the somewhat-rich residents of Wisconsin’s twenty-third State Assembly district elected Jim Ott as their representative. Mr. Ott—a former weather man in Milwaukee—is one of those deniers, a tragedy in his case because he has had training in meteorology and climatology, yet has abandoned science for ideology, and occupies a position of some influence.

Even if some of the super-rich would decide to use their fortunes in an attempt to “save” humankind from catastrophe, I doubt that they would use it to good purpose. For what is needed is not simply a switchover to “safe” sources of energy, but *societal system change*. Earlier I referred to plants “taking” nutrients from the soil. Now, let me add that any given species of plant has certain “design specifications”—i.e., certain needs to be fulfilled for continued health, and even survival. Humans can be thought of in like terms (see, e.g. George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*, 1977), for we are also products of nature.

If humans are perceived this way, it will be recognized that humans developed their “design specifications” during the period prior to the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago. And that since that Revolution we humans have been forced to have ways of life that are increasingly “discrepant” (to borrow a term from sociobiologist David P. Barash) relative to our “design specifications.” It’s no wonder that Jared Diamond has referred to the Agricultural Revolution as “The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race.” And that René Dubos has referred to human life as comparable to living in a zoo.

If attempts are made in this society to stave off disaster, those engaged in the attempts should recognize that the need is not only to move in a “greener” direction, but also one more in accord with human “design specifications”: we need not only to be able to live, but to have lives worth living—and these goals can only be both accomplished via societal system change, of the right sort.

How likely is it that this will occur? Were I a gambler I would say that the probability is about 0.0000001. Which means that my children and grandchildren are likely to have a miserable future—if they have any future at all. Which, in turn, makes me feel guilty for having had children. I hope that they will be able to forgive me!

The author is a resident of Greendale, Wisconsin—a sister community of Greenbelt, Maryland, and Green Hills in Cincinnati, Ohio; the three communities were created by the federal government during the FDR administration. He was a History major at (what was then) Wisconsin State College, Oshkosh, and has graduate degrees from the University of North

Carolina (Geography, Sociology) and University of Cincinnati (Urban Economic Geography, Economics). For the past 22 years he has been employed with an engineering (avionics) firm in Milwaukee.

February 10, 2010

The (Misunderstood) Love Command

Alton C. Thompson

The love command associated with Christianity and Judaism has, over the years, been tacitly understood as suggesting that one accept as a “given” the societal system of which one is a part, and that one then behave in a certain way relative to others in the context of that societal system. There are two problems with this view, however.

Before identifying those two problems, though, some commentary on the meaning intended for “love” in Biblical passages is warranted. In those passages it is important to keep in mind that “loving” behavior is not necessarily understood as having emotional affect associated with it. “Loving” behavior, rather than referring to feelings or attitudes on the part of the *lover*, refers instead to certain *effects* of the behavior in question on someone else, the *lovee*: “loving” behavior is behavior that increases the level of well-being of another. This effect may be *intended* by the lover (by, e.g., someone acting out of a sense of duty, obligation), but need not be. That is, in the Bible we are asked to think about “loving” from the perspective of the *recipient*: behavior directed at another that increases that other’s well-being is “loving” behavior, regardless of the intentions, feelings, or attitudes of the *lover*. Thus, the concept of “loving” that is current in our society is one that is foreign to the Bible.

As to the problems associated with the love command found in the Bible, the first is that the existing societal system within which the love command was (or is) advocated may have a motivational system—as part of the larger societal system—that is contrary to the command. As Thorstein Veblen noted in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (p. 263), “a hornless steer would find himself at a disadvantage in a drove of horned cattle.” In other words, trying to swim upstream takes a great deal of energy and determination. I’m sure that many in our society *sense* that the love command is impractical, but are unable to bring this “recognition” to the conscious level. Given that the basic ethical principle in our society’s motivational system is “screw your buddy” (hidden behind the claim that “accomplishment” is the driving force in our society), to follow the love command in our society is to go against the grain of our motivational system. Granted that the “screw your buddy” directive is more common with “uppers” in our society than with “lowers” (which helps explain—contrary to our “official” ideology—why the “uppers” are in that position), but it is the “uppers” who are in control in our society (obviously!), and set the “tone” for everyone else.

The second problem associated with the love command is that it is (and has been) commonly understood as asserting (tacitly at any rate) that “loving” behavior is an *end*—the *ultimate* end, in fact; whereas the fact of the matter is that—although evidently intended as such by those who have promulgated it—the command is a *means* to an end. An end that has not been recognized by those who have promulgated the command—and *could not* be recognized until after evolutionary thinking came to the fore during the nineteenth century (associated especially with the name of Charles Darwin—unfortunately).

One might say that, of course, “loving” behavior is a means to an end, the end being the increased well-being of the individual(s) to which the “loving” behavior has been directed (if but unintentionally). But such a conclusion is to misunderstand the *actual* end “sought” by those who have promoted the love command. I put “sought” in quotation marks here to indicate that those—such as Jesus (in Matthew 22:39, quoting Leviticus 19:18)—who have given this command have not understood the true basis of their uttering the command. We know that Jesus got the command from the book of Leviticus, but the person who wrote that command in Leviticus did not—*could* not—know the basis of the command. Because evolutionary thinking had not yet appeared on the scene.

What *is* that basis? Life as it existed for humans prior to the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago. The “Fall” of the Bible was actually the Agricultural Revolution (as Warren Johnson has noted); as Jared Diamond has stated, this Revolution was “The [Worst Mistake](#) in the History of the Human Race”). Diamond mentions some of the reasons for making this claim, but omits what is really important—the fact that prior to that Revolution humans had become “designed” to (1) be exposed to certain stimuli, (2) engage in certain behaviors, (3) ingest certain substances, (4) have a certain emotional life, and (5) use their brains in a certain way. What the Agricultural Revolution did for humans was give them ways of life that lacked accordance with their “design specifications”—and became increasingly “discrepant” (to use David P. Barash’s term) over time.

Now if one finds oneself having a way of life that is “discrepant” so far as one’s “design specifications” are concerned, one will react to this fact—on the unconscious level in that one’s physiological processes will become deviant, abnormal (resulting in physical ailments); and on the conscious level—where one may begin to engage in pathological behaviors (that affect oneself and/or others adversely, from a well-being standpoint), or “simply” feel depressed, etc. For example, class-caste systems were one of the “fruits” of the Agricultural Revolution, as some individuals began to turn against some of their fellows, and introduce the “screw your buddy” mentality into human thought processes (one result being the creation of class-caste systems).

Much of what has been recorded as “history” has been actions by deviants. However, there have been “sensitive ones” in post-“Fall” times who have been able to acquire a “remembrance” of pre-Fall existence, and who have experienced that “remembrance” so strongly that they have felt compelled to *act* on it—if only by writing down their ideas. Indeed, one could argue that without such “sensitive ones” in ancient Hebrew society no Bible would ever have been created! This is not to deny that the Bible is not a complex book with a multitude of themes; however, I would argue that the main one owes its existence to the thinking, writing, and acting of certain “sensitive ones” (such as Elijah, Amos, Hosea, and Jesus).

Their “intent”—without knowing it—has been to motivate their fellows (those damaged members of the elite in particular) to restore the sort of way of life that prevailed prior to the Fall. A way of life regarding which they had no direct knowledge, of course; so that if their ideas reflect the ethos of pastoral nomadism more than that of gatherer-hunters, this is because the Hebrews themselves may have originated from pastoral nomadic peoples (see Morris S. Seale, *The Desert Bible: Nomadic Tribal Culture and Old Testament Interpretation*, 1974.) Thus, although the love command that they invented seemingly is *individualistic* in nature, in actuality the “fact” that their “intent” was to restore a formerly-existing way of life means that their real

“objective” was *societal system change* in the direction of a more “natural” way of life. Indeed, I would even argue that the meaning that the Bible gives to “loving” (as I noted earlier) is consistent with this “goal” of accomplishing societal system change rather than adding to the well-being of individuals *as the result of actions by others*.

Consistent with the above conclusions it is interesting to note that in a “primitive” society (i.e., one specifically with a gatherer-hunter economy; or a “cynegetic” way of life, to use Paul Shepard’s term) there is little need for “loving” behavior—because the exploitation that characterizes “civilized” societies tends to be absent from “primitive” societies. In such societies people tend automatically to relate well with one another—for such behavior is a societal norm, and may even have a biological basis (i.e., the result of sexual selection; see, e.g., Nancy Makepeace Tanner). If someone needs help in such a society (a child, a sick person, someone who has been injured, an old person, perhaps even one born with severe deficiencies—although infanticide may be practiced with such individuals), help is given—and this is an automatic response, not done because one is told to, or aware of a commandment that urges one so to do.

I should add that if the basis of the Bible is the thoughts and actions of certain “sensitive ones,” so is much of the utopian literature. But caution must be exercised here for although Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* is a part of the utopian literature, William Morris had a much different vision of the Good Society (*News From Nowhere*)—and was, in fact, a critic of Bellamy’s utopian vision—and Morris’s vision of the Good Society seems to me to more accurately reflect cynegetic society than Bellamy’s vision.

Which, however, raises the question: If we wish to (re-)create the Good Society, how much should our thinking be governed about what we know about “primitive” societies? On the one hand we know that Earth could not support all of the world’s population if only a gatherer-hunter way of life prevailed. And Gregory Bateson has noted, astutely, that even if such a “return” were possible, it would not be advisable (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*)—because we would lose the wisdom which caused us to make the return. Still, as John H. Bodley and other anthropologists have noted, only gatherer-hunter societies have established themselves as viable (when not interfered with by “civilized” peoples!). For that reason, I believe it a good idea that we begin the process of developing a picture of the Good Society by identifying some of characteristics of “primitive” societies. Also, we should keep in mind that our “design specifications” as humans were established prior to the Agricultural Revolution—and we still have them.

1. “Primitive” groups (i.e., those with a gatherer-hunter economy—or, as Paul Shepard would say, “cynegetic” people) tend to maintain a stable size—because their birth and death rates are about equal, and there is an absence of in- and out-migration. If the population begins to exceed this “normal” size, some members typically leave to form their own group(s). The same happens if disagreements arise within the group that cannot get resolved.
2. Such people subsist on vegetative material and animal flesh, although there are variations here: with some groups fish are an important part of the diet, with some nuts are, etc.
3. Because a given group tends to retain the same approximate size over time, the amount of food “taken” tends not to vary much from year to year.

4. In principle this amount of “taking” could occur indefinitely because the food “taken” gets replenished—i.e., depletion does not occur.
5. Sustenance is obtained only from the local area.
6. The energy used for accomplishing tasks comes from members of the group (adult ones in particular), perhaps with the assistance of some animals.
7. If members of the group burn wood (for cooking, warmth), they harvest the wood at a replacement rate—so that no depletion of this “resource” occurs. (Keep in mind, however, that for such people a tree is not a mere “resource”—it is closer to being a friend, companion.)
8. Their burning of wood does not result in an accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere: as trees were growing, they were “breathing in” carbon dioxide; when wood is burned (or allowed to simply decay, decompose), it simply returns that carbon dioxide to the atmosphere—but not all of it, for some of it remains underground in the roots of the tree.
9. The mind of a “primitive” tends to be absorbed in the surround. This implies here-and-now thinking rather than thinking about either the past or future, or thinking beyond the local area. The latter would not be possible, of course, given that the individual would have little if any experience beyond the local area. There would, however, be “remembrances” of the past that would be passed along from generation to generation, and perhaps some thought about the future. Thinking, however, would tend to be idiographic, with some generalizations being made (and transmitted) that relate to that which one consumes as food.
10. Storytelling would occur, the primary purpose being to explain. The “characters” in these stories would be elements of the surround especially, animate as well as inanimate.
11. “Primitive” people think of time as cyclic, not linear. Thus, diurnal and seasonal changes are important in their thinking, but not changes in linear time.
12. “Primitives” tend to have an adaptive mentality. They adapt their minds to the here-and-now of a particular locality, and to natural rhythms. Nature and its rhythms are taken as a “given,” and nature is adapted to “thoughtlessly”—i.e., without intention, planning.
13. “Work” engaged in for sustenance (etc.) purposes is appreciated as an activity in itself, and is not thought of as a mere means (e.g., to get food).
14. One’s knowledge consists of personal observations, inferences from those observations, deductions based on both, plus what has been told. After all, “primitive” groups have an oral culture, not a literary one; and an aspect of that fact is that storytelling is an important part of the culture (see point 10 above).

Another list that would be worth giving thought to is one provided by George Edgin Pugh in *The Biological Origin of Human Values* (1977), “instinctive human motives”—which can be thought of as referring—in part at least—to human design specifications:

1. A desire for dominance (rivalry).

2. A desire for approval.
3. A desire for social acceptance.
4. Gregariousness.
5. The enjoyment of conversation.
6. An activity motive (a desire to exercise the body and develop physical skills).
7. The enjoyment of humor in conversation and play.
8. Social preferences.
9. A team motive (a desire to work with others for common goals).
10. A constructive motive (a desire to make/build things).
11. A contribution motive (a desire to contribute, to do something meaningful for one's society).

Pugh notes (p. 285) that “the proposed list of instinctive motives is sure to be controversial . . .,” but I have only (partial) objection is to the first motive he lists—a desire for dominance. I would assert, rather, that individuals naturally vary in their position on a leader-follower continuum. The fact of this variation can—under certain circumstances—lead to some individuals, in acting on the motive, becoming autocrats. Yet, it is not inevitable that this occur. Although generally I see a tendency toward dominance in negative terms (and have designed the NeWF to control the tendency, while also encouraging leadership tendencies in those more inclined to follow), I also recognize that any society needs both leaders and followers. In fact, if my NeWF proposal is to “get off the ground,” some individuals with leadership qualities will need to “start the ball rolling”—and others who are more inclined to follow will need to perceive the value in the movement, and become a part of it as followers. There is, of course, a danger in those with followership tendencies to become too passive, submissive, and those with leadership abilities to recognize this tendency in others, and take advantage of it—by becoming autocratic. I believe, however, that NeWF participation can foster the development of “habits of thought and action” such that these “natural” tendencies become suppressed—at least to the point that they do not pose a threat to the society.

I hesitate to go beyond the above in identifying principles to follow in creating the Good Society, because although I believe that some knowledge of the characteristics of “primitive” peoples and “instinctive human motives” is a good starting point for arriving at principles, and actions based on those principles, it is better to rely on current decision-making to generate such principles. Thus, I recommend the creation of NeWFs, first for discussion and consideration of the above principles, but also as sources of creativity for generating new principles. After all, we cannot return to a cynegetic existence, and must figure out how to structure a society that will be based on some other type of economy, and wish to retain some of the technology that has been developed to this point.

[I sent this to Bruce Robinson on March 1, for his www.religioustoleration.org web site; I received notification on March 2 that he had put it on the site, but had changed “global warming” in two places to “climate change.”]

A Reason (or Two) for Hope?

Alton C. Thompson

During the past month the following statement of Philip E. Slater (*The Pursuit of Loneliness*, 1970, p. 144) has been on my mind: “there is no particular reason why the United States could not become the center of the most beautiful, benign, and exciting culture the world has ever known.” Then today (March 1, 2010) I received an e-mail from Dan Maguire (a theology professor at Marquette University) with an extremely remarkable story attached to the e-mail about a dog (www.snopes.com/photos/animals/jasmine.asp).

The dog had been found by police in England, locked away in a shed and abandoned. The police took the dog to the local wildlife sanctuary, and the man who ran the sanctuary immediately proceeded to restore the dog to a normal condition. After this was accomplished (over a period of several weeks), the plan was to finding a home for the dog (which was given the name Jasmine).

However, she seems to have developed her own plans for her future. At some point she began to take it upon herself to welcome all new animal arrivals at the sanctuary—regardless of species. The employees of the sanctuary can’t remember just how this came about, but were amazed at observing this sort of behavior. Needless to say, Jasmine thereby gained for herself a permanent job at the sanctuary!

I’m not ashamed to state that this story brought tears of joy to my eyes, for it occurred to me that this story was a “good news” parable being told for our benefit as humans. On one hand the story makes one ask: “Why can’t humans be like this dog? Certainly we humans are more intelligent than dogs, aren’t we?” But the story can do more for us than cause us to ask this question.

Irving Sarnoff (*Society With Tears*, 1966, p. 256) declared years ago that none of the technologically “advanced” societies is fit for human habitation; Philip Slater has asserted (p. 92) that “our society was not designed for people;” and Gordon Rattray Taylor (*Rethink: A Paraprimitive Solution*, 1972, p. 19) has observed that “we live in a psychological slum.” Certainly a great deal of evidence could be adduced in support of these claims. But this dog story helps give us some hope, on the other hand, that our society can be made fit for human habitation.

To do so, however, will not be easy. I suggest, though, that a good starting point would be to reject two important “crimes against humanity”: the dogma of “original sin,” and the philosophy of Social Darwinism. The first “crime” flies in the face of abundant research—experimental, observational, primatological, anthropological, archeological, etc.—to the contrary. And the second “crime” is rooted in Darwin’s virtually worthless “theory” of Natural Selection. I wish that I could expound at length on this point here, but this is not the place to do so. Let me say

here simply that the purported competition—between species and within a given species—that is at the “heart” of that “theory” is simply not a law of nature; and that as early as the late 1800s Prince Peter Kropotkin published research findings (including his own) that contradicted this claim.

It is certainly true that the human has a higher intelligence than the dog—which fact gives us some measure of hope that human behavior can become more Jasmine-like. However, the fact that humans have not *used* their intelligence to achieve such an end gives one pause.

In noting that humans have not used their intelligence to create societies for themselves that would be fit to live in, I must immediately point out, however, that this claim must be qualified—and that it’s fortunate that this is the case. I must add here that anthropologists who have studied contemporary “primitive” groups during the past century have observed Jasmine-like behavior in most of the groups that they have studied. Which fact leads to the inference that *all* of the humans who lived 10,000 years ago (i.e., prior to the Agricultural “Revolution”) engaged in such behavior as a matter of course.

Warren Johnson (*Muddling Toward Frugality*, 1978, p. 43), in stating that “The Biblical legend of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden [the “Fall”] seems clearly to describe the invention of agriculture,” seems to have been suggesting that with the Agricultural “Revolution” a “discrepancy” began to develop between (1) the way of life for which humans had become “designed” (via the operation of certain selection mechanisms—such as sexual selection) and (2) the way of life that people were forced to live. For whereas ways of life began to change after this “Revolution” (and especially after the Industrial Revolution), human biology has remained basically the same.

The implications here are that if certain “design specifications” developed with humans prior to the Agricultural Revolution, it follows that (1) most human problems over the centuries have been rooted in that Discrepancy, and (2) if we serious about addressing those problems—including, e.g., that of “global warming” today—we will need to use our (supposed) intelligence to design for ourselves a way of life more in accord with our design specifications.

Rattray Taylor, in his pioneering book (p. 149), noted that “if we had the sense,” we would use our intelligence to see what we could learn from the “primitives.” Given that I do not have the luxury of writing a book about the matter here, let me note simply that the behaviors engaged in by members of a “primitive” group were *necessary* for the group to continue in existence:

- Indefinitely (assuming away external disturbances—such as those inflicted on them by “civilized” peoples!).
- As a *small* group.
- As a relatively *egalitarian* group.
- As a group within which a relatively high level of well-being (physical, psychological) was enjoyed by most members, most of the time.

We can also state that the behaviors that characterize *our* society are necessary to the society's continuation—but that *our* society differs in important ways from a “primitive” group, in favor of the latter. First, I would point out that Thorstein Veblen's 1900 “Industrial and Pecuniary Employments” made the point (if but rather indirectly!) that some jobs in our economy involve doing productive work (“industrial” ones), others do not. And that the value system of our society values the latter over the former—so that the most productive members of our society have the lowest status and receive the lowest incomes.

The situation today is somewhat different from what it was in Veblen's time (e.g., technology plays a more significant role), but it is still true that those in our economy who receive the highest compensation and most status, tend to make little contribution of a productive nature to the economy. If anything, in fact, Veblen's observation that those with pecuniary employments tend to be disturbers of the peace (so far as the smooth operation of the economy is concerned), is as true today as it was in Veblen's day—as events of the past two years demonstrate.

Not only does the prevailing value system of our society help produce an inequalitarian mass society within which ill-being is a widespread problem (even with the rich); it encourages behavior that militates against sustainability: on one hand we are in the process of exhausting resources (including those that are renewable); and on the other hand, our use of some resources—most notably fossil fuels—is resulting in “global warming.” A phenomenon that some deny; but one that, e.g., noted scientist James Lovelock (*The Revenge of Gaia*, 2006, xiii) believes will result in the virtual extinction of our species by 2100 CE.

If our “way out” is to learn what we can from our “primitive” ancestors, and then act on it, the question arises: What can we learn from them? Different people will answer this question differently, but here is my list:

- The human species is one of those species that falls into the category “social.” Indeed, not only do most humans have an innate *desire* to be with other humans; they have a *need* so to be: if, upon birth, one is abandoned, one is likely to die within a few days, even if not killed by a predator; if one is provided care by members of another species (a rare, but not unknown, occurrence) one will not develop into a recognizably human being but, rather, will become a “feral” being.
- Humans have a need to be a part of a small group—e.g., one no more than about 500 persons in size. (See, e.g., Kirkpatrick Sale's *Human Scale*, 1980—a huge book on the virtues of smallness!.) A “group” here should be understood as not merely a collection of individuals (i.e., a group in a *statistical* sense) but, rather, a set of individuals who interact one with another (i.e., a *sociological* group)—so that each person knows virtually all other members of the group.
- It is not enough (for a high level of well-being) simply to be a member of a small group, however. Harmonious relationships must characterize the group. This does not mean that all interactions within the group are conflict-free; it *does* mean, however, that when conflicts arise, that fact is of concern to other members of the group—who then “naturally” act to defuse the conflict. That is, there is unconscious “recognition” within the group that all have a stake in harmonious relationships, so that the social fabric must

not be allowed to become torn. Given this perception of conflict, when offenses occur, the point becomes to re-integrate the offender into the societal system again rather than inflict punishment—although at times that (and even banishment) may be called for.

- Healthy interaction involves such activities as conversing with others as equals (and in a manner such that individual views are welcomed and respected—rather than treated as, e.g., “heretical”); working together with others to provide sustenance (or other) needs; recreating together; and participating in certain rituals or ceremonies together.
- We humans are “designed” for physical activity, and must have a certain amount of it for good physical and mental health. Physical activity can be associated not only with work, but also play—and includes sexual activity. The latter, of course, will tend to be more strictly guided by mores established by the group than the other activities. (For a “design” perspective on humans see George Edgin Pugh, *The Biological Origin of Human Values*, 1977.)
- In working with others one must feel that one is making a contribution to the group—that one is not a “slacker.” Conversely, one must perceive *others* in the group as at least attempting to make a contribution to the group.
- Related to this point, however, one must feel that one’s contribution is one that “fits” one—in terms of one’s abilities, interests, etc.
- Also, in acting as an individual, one must feel that one is a decision-maker, not just acting out of blind habit or doing the bidding of others. (See, e.g., Elizabeth Boyden Howes and Sheila Moon, *Man [sic] the Choicemaker*, 1973.) One mark of a healthy interactional situation, in fact, is that all members of the group perceive (if but unconsciously) themselves this way, and feel that they have the respect of other members of the group.
- A final need that I would mention is extended periods of close contact with the “surround”—a point developed several years ago by noted scientist Edward O. Wilson (*Biophilia*, 1984).

But how can one *use* these principles, one may very well ask. I could provide some suggestions, but believe it wise to stop at this point: I believe that I have stated enough to stimulate thought (as if I had told a parable!), and believe that if I have given the reader some reason to have optimism, and some “raw materials” to work with, the next thing I should do is simply get out of the way!

The (Misunderstood) Love Command: Part II

Alton C. Thompson

One tends to *see* through the lens provided by one's society. Because of this, it is difficult to reach the point where one is able to see *through* that lens—i.e., come to realize that one tends to understand in a way that one's society “wants” one to. So that although one may recognize that the economy is *our* society's dominant “sector” (with the financial subsector being dominant within *that* sector), one may not perceive the other sectors as playing a subservient role relative to that dominant sector.

But it is that sort of interrelationship between the sectors of a society that make it a *societal system*. So that with our society today:

- The media are supportive of the dominant sector—if only by diverting one's attention away from it.
- Our government is controlled by the large firms in that sector—using such concepts as “enemies” and “terrorists” to justify huge expenditures of taxpayer dollars to support imperialistic policies while simultaneously making record profits.
- “Educational” institutions—from kindergarten on through the university—either provide intellectual justification for the Existing Order, or train one in areas that pose no threat to the Existing Order. If the purpose of education is to help one become a critical and creative thinker, it is clear that our “educational” institutions are so in name only.
- Our “religious” institutions focus on a supposed afterlife. And insofar as they *do* give attention to the here-and-now, their concern tends to be with platitudes, and promote the idea that a “good” person is one who refrains from engaging in various vices, and who is “religious” about participating in various rituals—including just going to church. Some churches, in fact, are such good servants of our dominant sector that they preach a “success” gospel!—and manage to find a Biblical basis for this blasphemy.
- Etc.

One must admit, however, that churches that claim to be Bible-based (some churches advertise themselves thusly) are in a difficult position. It is clear that the love command is the central directive not only of the “New Testament,” but the Old (i.e., the Hebrew Bible—that Christians denigrate by referring to it as the “Old Testament”). However, as Thorstein Veblen noted many years ago (1899) in Chapter Eight (“Industrial Exemption and Conservatism”) of his famous *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-8.txt>), “All classes are in a measure engaged in the pecuniary struggle, and in all classes the possession of the pecuniary traits counts towards the success and survival of the individual.”

The first sentence in that chapter is: “The life of man in society, just like the life of other species, is a struggle for existence, and therefore it is a process of selective adaptation.” Veblen had, of course, derived the phrase “struggle for existence” from Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859, beginning with the fifth edition, published in 1869); and Darwin, in turn, had borrowed the phrase from Herbert Spencer. And although this phrase became the justification for Social Darwinism, Veblen was by no means a Social Darwinist in the ordinary sense. For although Veblen noted that “the possession of the pecuniary traits counts towards the success and survival of the individual,” by no means did he mean to imply by this that “successful” people are productive members of the society—quite the contrary, in fact.

In these passages Veblen made no explicit reference to the Biblical command to love the neighbor, but in effect he was noting that given the importance of “pecuniary traits” in our society, and the obvious fact that one does not associate loving behavior with such traits, it follows that the Christian churches in our society are placed in a difficult situation. For given that the churches in our society receive their financial support from their members, the churches cannot afford (literally!) to “produce” people who take the love command seriously, and therefore are likely poor (unless they have inherited wealth). It is not surprising, then, that although the Christian churches in our society occasionally give lip service to the love command, they cannot afford to have their members take this command “to heart.”

This is not to say that *no* church members are guided significantly by this command—for we all know people who take this command seriously (including many who are not churchgoers, of course). But that’s not what I wish to focus on in this essay. Rather, my point here is that even those who *do* take the command seriously tend to misunderstand the *nature* of the command.

Before developing that point, however, I must note that there are at least three varieties of history. First, there is the conventional variety found in virtually all textbooks. This type of history sees the story of humankind’s development as one of “progress”—from savagery to civilization. In interpreting “progress” it tends to focus on developments in the sciences and in technology, and does so in such a way as to convince the reader that it is simply “obvious” that the story of our species’s *historical* (as opposed to biological) change over time has been one of accelerating “progress.”

Second, there is what I refer to as “Dark Side” history—illustrated by Eugene Linden’s brilliant *Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies*, 1979). The value system that guides the writing of such history is one that holds that human well-being is the ultimate good—so that the Good Society is one in which most members have a high level of well-being most of the time. “Well-being” in this case is not defined in materialistic (“standard of living”) terms but, rather, in psychological terms—informed by evolutionary thinking, especially. Writers of “dark side” histories “admit” that there has been technological “advance” over time, but would disagree with the assumption that all of this advance has been “appropriate.” Indeed, their focus is in pointing to the unfortunate side effects that have accompanied this “advance”—which have not only contributed to ill-being in many, but seem to be leading humankind to the brink of ecocatastrophe.

The third type of history—were it to exist (it *doesn't* to any significant degree!)—agrees with the “findings” of Dark Side historians, but is activist in orientation. The “events” of interest to this third type of historian are those that can be construed as directed at improving the well-being of one’s fellows: critiques of one’s society, ideas as to how the society should be, and proposals for moving “from here to there.” Interestingly, some of the “players” in such histories have assumed that things were better in the past, so that what was necessary was some sort of “return.”

It turns out that those who sensed that there was a past “Eden” were correct in their intuitions. However, they were unable to articulate—and support—those intuitions until evolutionary thinking appeared on the scene, especially during the latter part of the nineteenth century. But the appearance of that sort of thinking resulted in two divergent intellectual paths. On one hand was the development of Social Darwinistic thinking, based on the “struggle for existence” myth—and it *was* a myth. But on the other hand was the development of “discrepancy” thinking, illustrated somewhat in the writings of Prince Peter Kropotkin, and more decidedly in the writings of Thorstein Veblen. In fact, I trace such thinking back to Thorstein Veblen, two of his works in particular (an article, and a book)—but will not do so here, for my focus in this essay lies elsewhere.

In brief, the basis for the Discrepancy concept is the assumption that prior to the “Agricultural Revolution” of 10,000 years ago there occurred co-development of humans as biological entities and their way of life (i.e., gathering-hunting). (I have used quotation marks here because the “Revolution” being referred to here did not occur overnight.) With the “Agricultural Revolution,” however, ways of life began to change while human biology remained basically unchanged. What this meant is that a growing “discrepancy” was occurring between the way of life (1) for which humans had become “designed” and the way of life (2) they were required to live. Put another way, the ways of life that began emerging were increasingly “unnatural.”

The implications of this growing discrepancy have likely been manifold—and basically negative. But it is beyond the scope of this essay to summarize the research regarding that topic. I will, however, identify one example of an outstanding work in this area: Noel T. Boaz, *Evolving Health: The Origins of Illness and How the Modern World is Making Us Sick*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002

My interest here is in the fact that since the Agricultural Revolution certain “sensitive ones” have sensed that a Discrepancy existed; and that although they were not able to articulate this concept until the appearance of evolutionary thinking, they did not wait for such thinking to appear before they began acting and writing about what they sensed. Prior to Darwin’s time I detect two streams of thought having their origin in a sensed Discrepancy—“utopian” writing (whether taking the form of fictional writing, or specific recommendations for a Better Society), and “prophetic” writing—illustrated by much of the content of the Hebrew Bible.

I am specifically interested in the fact that the love command is central to both the New and Old Testaments of Christianity, and the Hebrew Bible. And the point that I wish to make in this essay is that although that command takes various forms (especially in the Hebrew Bible), it has been misunderstood for centuries—even since (surprisingly) the advent of evolutionary thinking during the nineteenth century. Ostensibly the love command states that one should behave in a

certain way relative to others, given one's context (i.e., the nature of the societal system within one lives). I will argue, however, that that is not the real intent of the command—and that even those who issued this command were not fully cognizant of the command's real intent.

Today, the love command is misunderstood in at least two ways—the *meaning* that should be given to “love,” and the ultimate *intent* of the command. First, let us clarify the meaning that “love” typically has in the Bible (referring now to the Christian Bible). Such clarification is important because of our tendency today to equate “romance” and “love,” whereas “love” is typically not thought of in romantic terms in the Bible.

In those passages that refer (directly or indirectly) to “love,” “loving” behavior is not necessarily understood as having emotional affect associated with it. “Loving” behavior, rather than referring to feelings or attitudes on the part of the *lover*, refers instead to certain *effects* of the behavior in question on someone else, the *lovee*: “loving” behavior is behavior that increases the level of well-being (physical especially) of another. This effect may be *intended* by the *lover* (by, e.g., someone acting out of a sense of duty, obligation), but need not be. That is, in the Bible we are asked to think about “loving” from the perspective of the *recipient*: behavior directed at another that increases that other's well-being is “loving” behavior, regardless of the intentions, feelings, or attitudes of the *lover*. Thus, the concept of “loving” that is current in our society is one that is foreign to the Bible.

A second interpretational problem associated with “love” in the Bible is that “love” is (and has been) commonly understood as asserting (tacitly at any rate) that “loving” behavior is an *end*—the *ultimate* end, in fact; whereas the fact of the matter is that—although evidently intended as such by those who have promulgated it—the command is a *means* to an end. An end that perhaps has been *sensed* by those who promulgated it, but *could not* be clearly recognized and articulated until anthropological and evolutionary thinking began developing during the nineteenth century.

One might say that, of course, “loving” behavior is a means to an end, the end being the increased well-being of the individual(s) to which the “loving” behavior has been directed (if but unintentionally). But such a conclusion is to misunderstand the *actual* end “sought” by those who have promoted the love command. I put “sought” in quotation marks here to indicate that those—such as Jesus (in Matthew 22:39, quoting Leviticus 19:18)—who have given this command have not understood the true basis of their uttering the command. We know that Jesus derived the command from the book of Leviticus, but the person who wrote that command in Leviticus did not—*could not*—know the basis of the command. Because anthropological and evolutionary thinking had not yet appeared on the scene.

What had to occur before the true end of the love command could be discerned was the development of the discrepancy concept—which concept I would trace back (as I indicated above) to Thorstein Veblen. The *naming* of this concept can apparently be credited to sociobiologist David P. Barash. But the concept itself goes at least back to Veblen—and perhaps even earlier to Charles Fourier, and even others.

However, the point that I wish to emphasize here is that although the *concept* of a Discrepancy is a recent one (and could not be otherwise), the *sensing* of a Discrepancy goes back centuries, even millennia, in time. The Hebrew prophets who sensed the Discrepancy likely had no knowledge of gatherer-hunter existence, but likely had knowledge of pastoral nomadic existence (as a part of the history perhaps), and may have directly derived their value system from that knowledge. (Morris S. Seale, in his *The Desert Bible: Nomadic Tribal Culture and Old Testament Interpretation*, 1974, has argued along these lines.)

The love command that these prophets invented seemingly is *individualistic* in nature—i.e., ostensibly it is a command to individuals to be their “brother’s keeper.” In actuality, though, the “fact” that their “intent” was to restore a formerly-existing way of life means that their real “objective” was *societal system change* in the direction of a more “natural” way of life. Indeed, I would even argue that the meaning that the Bible gives to “loving” (as I noted earlier) is consistent with this “goal” of accomplishing societal system change rather than adding to the well-being of individuals *as the result of actions by others*.

Direct evidence, in the Bible, in support of this claim is, I will admit, rather minimal. But at several points in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Isaiah 65:21 – 22) there is reference to a Good Society of sorts: People will be able to build houses, and live in them; people will be able to plant vineyards, and enjoy the wine produced from them. This, however, is a rather odd vision of the Good Society in that it involves independent households, so that the society is merely a collection of households (an atomistic concept of society, à la John Locke). Although no reference is made to interactions within and between those households, such interactions can be assumed to occur—but are not regarded as of importance. What such a vision of the Good Society seems to suggest is that it originated with oppressed people, who therefore perceived *liberty* as the ultimate value. I am reminded here of the vision of a Good Society promoted by Ralph Borsodi (in *Flight From the City*, 1933) during the Great Depression—the Good Society as consisting of “homestead colonies.”

A more relevant vision of what can be construed as the Good Society (although the actual reference was to *congregations*) occurs in I Corinthians 12:12 – 31, wherein Paul of Tarsus uses a body analogy in referring to a group. Paul, in this passage, recognized that people vary in their abilities and other characteristics, and that this variation can be “harnessed” for the good of the group. So that just as a human body has a certain degree of integrity—and a high degree of functional interrelatedness—so can a human group have such characteristics. At any rate, a group (congregation in Paul’s case) *should* have those characteristics. The use of a body analogy suggests that a whole—a society in this case—is more than the sum of its parts; it is not just a collection of households (or individuals). The analogy also suggests that the various parts comprising a society are of equal importance; if a given part is not functioning properly, the entire society is affected adversely.

One reason why Paul’s use of an analogy here was so important is that it is much easier to visualize a body, and its various connected parts, much more difficult to visualize a Good Society; but that if one becomes convinced that a society *should* resemble a human body in certain respects, this can help motivate one to work at creating such a society.

A question that suggests itself here is: If we wish to (re-)create the Good Society, how much should our thinking be governed about what we know about “primitive” societies? On the one hand we know that Earth could not support all of the world’s population if only a gatherer-hunter way of life prevailed. And Gregory Bateson has noted, astutely, that even if such a “return” were possible, it would not be advisable (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*)—because we would lose the wisdom which caused us to make the return. Still, as John H. Bodley and other anthropologists have noted, only gatherer-hunter societies have established themselves as viable (when not interfered with by “civilized” peoples!). For that reason, I believe it a good idea that we begin the process of developing a picture of the Good Society by identifying some of characteristics of “primitive” societies (as I do in my “A Reason (or Two) for Hope” on this site).

We need to keep in mind that our “design specifications” as humans were established prior to the Agricultural Revolution—and we still have them. This does not mean that we need to abandon all features of “civilized” existence: yesterday morning I listened to Beethoven’s Seventh symphony on my way to and from work, and would hate to think that I need to give up my attachment (I didn’t want to use the word “love”!) to classical music. However, we ignore our “design specifications” at our own peril.

Christianity: “Fix it or Forget It”

Alton C. Thompson

It is reported that in ancient Greece Diogenes of Sinope [412/404 – 323 BCE] walked the streets of Athens with a lantern “looking for an honest man.”⁶¹⁷ Were Diogenes alive today, I can imagine him walking through the streets of _____ (you fill in the blank) looking for a Bible-based Christian church. Note that I did not say Bible-*believing* (of which many make the claim) but, rather, Bible-*based*. And although by “Bible” I mean specifically the “New Testament,” I recognize that Jesus and all of his early followers were Jews, for whom Hebrew Scriptures were the Bible.

What would a Bible-based church look like? The basic principle that I would use in answering this question is that Judaism had an orientation to *orthopraxy* (*not* orthodoxy), so that it is reasonable to assume that Jesus and his earliest followers also had such an orientation. It seems obvious that Jesus’s *orthopraxy* was of a more “liberal” variety than was common for his time (a point that comes through loud and clear in his Good Samaritan parable); but this does not alter the fact that his orientation was to proper *behavior*, not “right thinking.”

Given this fact, I would identify four “fundamental” features of a Bible-based Christianity:

- If “proper behavior” was *illustrated* by his Good Samaritan parable, it was *stated* (in a *suggestive*, rather than *definitive* manner) in the famous “sheep and goats” passage of Matthew 25: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, invite strangers in, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison. Indeed, in this passage the “suggestions” are given force by making them a “plan of salvation”: if one makes these “commands” the center of one’s life, one will spend eternity in a pleasant place; if one does not, well

Where does one find a Christian church that makes these commands *central*, rather than *tangential*? It’s not that these commands are totally ignored, but the tendency is merely to give them lip service, and to emphasize, rather, belief and ritual as the heart of Christianity. How utterly unbiblical!

- Paul had the insight to recognize that *having* a set of rules does not guarantee that those rules will be *followed* well. Even if one agrees that one should follow the above “commands,” and *intends* to follow them, one will find that at times one will fail to do what one knows is right, and at other times will do that which one knows is wrong (see Romans 7). Paul’s “solution” to this problem was indwelling by the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5) That is, if one experiences such indwelling, Paul suggested, this will help one “follow the straight and narrow.”

⁶¹⁷ Diogenes is believed to be a founder of the Cynic school of philosophy. He left no writings behind, and is known primarily through *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, written by Diogenes Laërtius, who lived some time after 200 CE.

Unfortunately, although it appears that the Holy Spirit played a prominent role in early Christianity (see, e.g., Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity*, 1995), Paul gave (in his extant writings) no instructions regarding how to “attract” the Holy Spirit. And what contribution have Christians made to this problem since Paul’s time? Nothing of which I am aware. They haven’t even arrived at a conception of “Holy Spirit” that would be relevant for today.

- In I Corinthians 12 Paul made an analogy between a body and a congregation, noting that just as a body consists of a number of diverse parts that, however, are connected one to another, and work together for the good of the body, so should members of a congregation be diverse in their characteristics, and work together in harmony. Doing what? Engaging in the sorts of activities specified in Matthew 25, of course.

But where are the Christian churches wherein there is recognition that the commands of Matthew 25 are best pursued not (only) by individuals acting alone, but by individuals acting in concert with others? Where are the Christian churches where *that* is central rather than “services”? What an inappropriate name for meetings whose orientation is not to service in a Matthew 25 sense but, rather, to listening to a minister or priest babble on about something, hymn-singing, creed-repetition and the like!

- One of the interesting features of a Bible-based church is that once it has derived the above from the Bible, it will *discard* the Bible—and on the authority of the Bible itself! How else is one to interpret Jesus’s reference to leaving a Helper (i.e., the Holy Spirit) in John’s gospel (chapters 14, 15, and 16)?! In, e.g., Matthew 25 we are given *general* instructions, but in real-world situations we need more *specific* help. What Jesus is telling us here is that for *specific* help we need to look to the Holy Spirit.

We are not, unfortunately, informed by Jesus (in the gospels) regarding *how* to seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Paul’s body analogy, though, seemingly suggests an answer: If a given congregation functions as a body does, its members *might* receive guidance from the Holy Spirit. But where are the Christian congregations where such guidance is even being sought? I know of none!

I have been a churchgoer for most of my life, but have never even *heard* of a Christian church that conforms to the above principles. What a pathetic comment to make regarding Christianity! Who was it who said that Christianity conquered the world, and that in the process the world conquered Christianity?!

June 28, 2010

The Good Society

James B. Gray

The concept of a “Good” (or “Better,” “Ideal,” etc.) society has been with us for centuries,ⁱ providing evidence for the validity of Discrepancy Concept.ⁱⁱ Discussions of the Good Society have typically taken the form of “utopian” novels, the term “utopian”ⁱⁱⁱ having originated with Sir Thomas More [1478 – 1535], whose novel *Utopia* was published in 1516. However, having no skills as a novelist, I must resort here to a prosaic—and rather short—presentation of my ideas relative to the Good Society.

The first point that I would like to make is that “Good Society” is a hypothetical construct which can be “described”^{iv} in terms of (a) societal characteristics, (b) the characteristics of the individuals “residing” within it, or (c) both. Second, it should be obvious that the purpose in presenting “utopian” ideas is twofold: to (a) offer (if but indirectly) a critique of the Existing Order, and (b) suggest that the Existing Order *could* be other than it is. The latter “suggestion,” however, is of little value unless accompanied by some practical recommendations regarding *how* to get “from here to there.” Meaning that much of the “utopian” literature produced to date has had a major deficiency.

As my “Can the Churches Be a Vehicle for Salvation?” has not only offered “Good Society” ideas but presented some suggestions of “getting there,” I would like to think that I have made a contribution to the literature with some degree of importance. However, whereas “Can the Churches” focused primarily on summarizing the ideas of others regarding goals for the Good Society—emphasizing “design specifications”—and I believe in going *beyond* “design specifications,”^v I would like to use this essay to elaborate somewhat on the “Gray area” recommendations that I made in “Can the Churches.”

Despite the fact that Good Society characteristics can be identified at both societal and individual levels, I tend to think of such characteristics primarily in individual terms, and therefore focus on individual characteristics below. There is one point that I would like to make of a societal nature, however, which is that I think of the Good Society as having a *varied* population. It might seem unnecessary to make this point explicit, given that sexual reproduction would, of course, occur in the Good Society, and would thereby “naturally” produce a varied population. My reason for making this point explicit, however, is that I wish to emphasize that I do *not* perceive the builders of the Good Society as having as one of their goals the creation of a “master race”—via controlled breeding, cloning, etc.^{vi}

I would qualify this somewhat in two ways, however. First, if certain individuals were known to be carriers of deleterious genes, they would be encouraged *not* to reproduce—to take, rather, the course of adoption should they want children. Such individuals would not, though, be forced to take this course, only strongly encouraged—with the reasoning behind that urging being made as clear as possible to those involved.

A second qualification that I should mention is related to the fact that I believe in the possibility of overpopulation. I believe that *no* species—including, most certainly, our own—can breed without limit. On the one hand, some “resources” are non-renewable, and for that reason should be used wisely, not squandered. Given that an increasing population size of necessity puts pressure on such resources, “wise use” in this case includes population limitation. Again, population limitation would be accomplished not through the exercise of force but, rather, education and exhortation. Given that the feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and insecurity that are common in contemporary society would be absent from the Good Society, the use of those procedures likely would be very effective.

A point that should be added here is that if we think of the Good Society as primarily comprised of Cooperative Eco-Communities (CECs) and Ecological Company Towns (ECTs), an implication is that although families would exist in much the same form as they do in contemporary society, within any given community all of the adults would, in a sense, adopt a parenting role relative to the children resident in the community. Not only would this be a psychologically healthy situation for the children; it would provide carriers of known deleterious genes an opportunity to forgo producing progeny while still being able to have parenting experience; and would provide a similar opportunity to those adult couples unable to produce progeny, but not wanting to pursue the adoption avenue. For these reasons, the “atmosphere” and opportunities in a Good Society should be such that the “education and exhortation” referred to above should be effective. And insofar as such efforts fail in certain cases, those involved in the “failures” should not be ostracized from their communities but, rather, be recognized as having certain rights relative to reproduction and parenting—rights which the community is willing to support, even if the overwhelming majority in the community questions the exercise of those rights in certain cases. The basic principle here is that love of the neighbor is given a very broad interpretation; the principle is not without limits, but those limits are barely visible.

Renewable resources are another category, on the other hand, but one must keep in mind that a “sustainable yield” is associated with such resources. That is, during a given year Earth is capable of producing only a certain amount of such a resource, and that amount is not a fixed quantity but, rather, is a variable one. The latter fact means that usage during a given year should never exceed the amount “produced” (by Nature) during the leanest year—and should not even approach that. If a reasonable amount is to be “harvested” during a given year, an implication is that the world’s population must not be allowed to expand to the point where the demands it places on renewable resources begins to threaten the resource itself.

The question, then, is not *whether* population should be limited but (a) the *level* at which it should be limited and (b) *how*. Both of the latter “questions” pose difficulties, of course, for technological developments can potentially affect (upward only?) the level number, and the fact that Earth is divided into numerous sovereign units (with the United Nations basically lacking in sovereignty) makes difficult control of the world’s population. Indeed, it is difficult enough to control population size in a given country, given the existence of various intellectual, religious, and ideological barriers. And any attempts to do so should proceed with extreme caution, given the moral issues associated with the matter. That said, we must keep in mind that humans are a part of Nature, and that the ecological principles that apply for other species also apply—although with less force—for us as well.

I will not comment further on desirable *societal* characteristics for the simple reason that doing so would be contrary to an important principle: The residents of the Good Society would be decision-makers—able to make decisions, encouraged so to do, and actively involved in so doing. Given this, it is not possible to predict what decisions those residents would make collectively of a *societal* nature. It would therefore not only be *wrong* of me to suggest the sorts of societal decisions should be made, but *foolish* of me as well. I *have*, true, made some recommendations of a societal nature, because I'm convinced that those recommendations are of exceeding importance in pertaining to our species's *survival*. But because I believe that members of the Good Society would be able—and motivated—to make good decisions, including of a *societal* nature, I believe it unnecessary, and even foolish, to offer any more suggestions having a societal scope.

As I noted above, my thoughts regarding the Good Society have an *individual* focus primarily, and have their basis (I would like to think) in the (Christian) Bible—my particular *interpretation* of the “thrust” of that book, of course, as indicated in “Can the Churches”—and in reason and empirical findings. That the characteristics that I identify are the virtual opposite of those found in contemporary USan society is, of course, an ironic commentary on our “Christian” society. Which, of course, raises the question: On what basis do we claim that ours is a “Christian” society?! My short answer to that question being that *whatever* it is, it is not a Biblical one!

That's not the point that I wish to emphasize here, however. Rather, on the basis of several different “dimensions” (perception, attitudes, and behaviors) I wish, first, to characterize the individuals who would people the Good Society, as I conceive it. In the second section I touch on the matter of *how* those attributes can be acquired. And in the Conclusion I offer a few comments on our society's current set of individual characteristics, and why we have them.

Individual Characteristics in the Good Society

E. F. Schumacher [1911 – 1977], in his *A Guide for the Perplexed*,^{vii} identified four “levels of being,” (a) matter, (b) life, (c) consciousness, and (d) self-consciousness—the idea here being that some things consist of just matter, other things of life and matter, still others of consciousness, life, and matter, with humans being perhaps unique in having not only matter, life, and consciousness, but *self-consciousness* as well. In the Good Society the individual would make these “obvious” distinctions, but those *perceptions* would play a secondary role in how things would be perceived. Note that the notion of “levels” is a *quantitative* one involving *ranking*, if but implicitly. The suggestion with this notion of “levels,” then, is that things at a given level are not only “lower” or “higher” relative to things at other levels but “inferior” or “superior.”

In the Good Society individuals would strive to perceive the elements of Nature (and even human-created things) in *qualitative* rather than *quantitative* terms—as varying in *kind*, but not *degree*. As, that is, being *different* but *equal*. And what would aid such a perception of things is that everything in Nature—including some human-made things—would be perceived as imbued with “spirit.” An invisible—but real—“something” associated with an individual thing that gave it a “presence.” So that not only do animals (including humans) have a “presence,” but so do, e.g., rock formations. (One thinks here, e.g., of Nathaniel Hawthorne's “The Great Stone Face”).

There follows from this way of perceiving Nature certain *attitudes*. First, there is an attitude of *reverence* for the things in Nature. It does not follow that one having this attitude toward Nature will wish to engage in the “worship” of Nature, but what *does* follow from such an attitude is an *adaptational* rather than *control* mentality. That is, if one perceives “presence” in the elements of Nature, and therefore develops an attitude of *reverence* toward them, one will quite “naturally” adopt the stance that one’s role as an “actor” in Nature is to “fit in” with the rest of Nature. This does not mean that one will refrain from killing members of other species for the purpose of satisfying one’s hunger—for one will know that many living things are able to continue living only because they eat other living things (or parts of such—e.g., leaves of a tree). It *does* mean, however, that one will recognize that in the absence of external changes Nature maintains a certain balance, and that one must not disturb that balance through excessive killing or irresponsible reproduction.

The stance that one takes toward Nature has some carryover value for how one relates to other human individuals. One develops a feeling a reverence for one’s fellows—whether they are within one’s immediate group or members of some other group. Because of that, one will not act toward others in a manner calculated to take advantage of or harm others. One will want to interact with others, and will make an effort to “engage” those with whom one interacts.^{viii} If another wishes to be alone during some given time period, one will respect that wish for privacy. If another is in need of some sort of assistance, one will oneself attempt to provide it; or if one believes that some other individual would be more qualified to provide the assistance, one contacts that other person regarding the matter.

One will recognize that one is unique—and recognize the same quality regarding every other person. In recognizing this fact about oneself and others it will “dawn” on one that whether or not it has a “purpose,” it is a fact that can be a potential blessing for all: If each individual recognizes one’s uniqueness, attempts to develop one’s “native” abilities, and then uses them to contribute to the well-being of others, all will benefit. Not only will all “recipients”^{ix} benefit from what they have received from others; the “giver” will as well. For we are so “designed” that we gain a sense of well-being not from directly pursuing happiness (contrary to what Thomas Jefferson seems to have suggested), but from doing things that we like to do—which in many cases involves, directly or indirectly, doing that which will contribute to the well-being of others. Needless to say, one in recognizing one’s uniqueness would not only insist that one has a right to develop in a manner of one’s own choosing, but would insist that all others have that same right. But not only would one recognize such a right in others; one would do what one could to help others develop self-knowledge and a positive self-image.

Members of the Good Society would not, however, be “driven” people. They would devote effort to discovering and developing their “native” abilities, but not to the point of excess. For they would not feel that they were in competition with others; and they would recognize that they have a need to interact with their fellows, and that by spending a significant amount of time so doing, one would be gaining a sense of well-being, the others would as well, and in consequence a sense of group solidarity would develop (without discordant feelings of “us” and “them” developing).

How Can Such Attributes Be Developed?

I will make four points here briefly, making reference to my “Can the Churches” as providing more details:

- (1) Children should be raised using the recommendations provided by Jean Liedloff (see Chapter 4 of “Can the Churches”).
- (2) Adults should participate in New Word Fellowships (NeWFs), discussed in Chapter 5 of “Can the Churches.”
- (3) People should live in Cooperative Eco-Communities (CECs) or Ecological Company Towns (ECTs).
- (4) The ideas in Deuteronomy 6:

⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

should be given a modern formulation. That is, the members of a given portion of the Good Society should arrive at agreed-upon goals for themselves, make them explicit, and make them widely available—so that members of the society would be constantly be made aware of the goals they wished to achieve. Our ancestors just happened to develop a way of life that provided well-being for themselves—they did not plan on creating a Good Society, and likely were not even aware that they were living in a Good Society. We moderns, however, most decidedly do not live in a Good Society; given that our habits of thought and action have been formed in an “unGood” society, we need all the help we can get in our efforts to create a Good Society!

Conclusions

Thomas Jefferson, in declaring (in 1776) that all (men) have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, was writing in the context of a series of colonies under the control of a distant country—and desirous of being liberated from that control. That the goals that he enumerated were all of an *individualistic* nature—and oriented to *rights* rather than *responsibilities*—was entirely understandable. However, even after independence was achieved, the orientation to individual *rights* remained dominant. An ironic fact for a country claiming to be Bible-based.

The institutional developments that occurred in this country subsequent to Independence tended to *reflect* this intellectual orientation; and as individuals were raised in this milieu, they tended to acquire an individualistic mindset as a matter of course. Indeed, acquisition of such a mindset became necessary for success, if not survival, in the country (unless one were born into wealth). And the fact that Westward expansion was a fundamental feature of our history—and that a self-orientation was necessary for survival on the frontier—contributed to the perpetuation, and even intensification, of an individualistic mentality. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s praise of

the “qualities” that developed among people on the frontier undoubtedly has some basis in fact. It must be kept in mind, however, that “individualism” by its very nature is a self-regarding stance that has little in common with the Golden Rule.

While attending school—whether public or private—one finds out that one is constantly being evaluated—in how one performs relative to one’s classmates. As a consequence, one learns that being competitive is an important “quality” in our society, and quite naturally tends to develop a competitive spirit. The sports played at school are all of a competitive nature (even though cooperative games *do* exist); many “clubs” associated with schools (e.g., forensics and debate) have a competitive orientation; and there are even music competitions. It’s true that “teamwork” is associated with many of the activities found at schools, but competition occurs not only *between* teams but *within* them.

If many of the activities that one engages in—either as a matter of choice or necessity—force one to be competitive, just living in the society “teaches” one to be materialistic—in the sense of valuing material things. One is constantly bombarded with advertising—on the radio, on television, on billboards—that “teaches” one not only to value material things, but to think of one’s “standing” relative to others in the possession of things—new, expensive things in particular.

As one ages (and especially after one leaves childhood, and begins one’s “schooling”), one tends to become less and less “in tune” with one’s nature as a human being. The question arises, however: Have we perhaps reached a point in our history where more and more of our citizens are beginning to sense this “discrepancy,” and therefore might be open to ideas regarding a new direction? Open even to the “radical” ideas of my “Can the Churches”?

I will continue to attempt to publicize my ideas (as presented in “Can the Churches”), my hope being that at some point one or more individuals will become attracted to them, and will begin the process of implementation—or further development, and then implementation of *those* ideas.

Endnotes

ⁱ See, e.g., the massive book on the subject by Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979. Also, J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Good Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1616 – 1770*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

ⁱⁱ I have no explanation, however, for the fact that “utopian” writing has especially been associated with England and the United States.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Utopia” literally means “no place.” The fact that Sir Thomas More chose this title for his novel suggests that he had resigned himself to the “fact” that his ideal society was incapable of realization. Perhaps this is why “utopian” is so often interpreted as meaning “impractical,” “impossible.”

^{iv} I put “described” in quotation marks because one usually thinks of a “description” as being of something *actual*, *real*, rather than “merely” hypothetical.

^v I believe that the goals that we select must be *consistent* with our “design specifications,” but need not *correspond* with them—so that it should be possible for us moderns to develop a way of life that is even better than that

developed (accidentally, I would assume) by our gatherer-hunter ancestors. The fact that our world today is very different from the world of 10,000 years ago means that (a) it is not now *possible* to return to a gatherer-hunter mode of life, and (b) would be foolish to return even if possible—if only because of the possibility of creating a better way of life than was had by our ancient ancestors.

^{vi} See, e.g., Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

^{vii} New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1978, p. 15 ff. Originally published in 1977 by Harper & Row, Publishers.

^{viii} Meaning that there would be no manufactured cordiality—no presentation of a “false front.”

^{ix} A “recipient” need not be just one to whom something has been given directly. I think, e.g., of my rather extensive CD collection of “classical” music—and how much I have “received” from so many composers long dead.